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ELEANOR'S VICTORY.

ELEANOR'S VICTORY.

BY

M. E. BRADDON,

AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "AURORA FLOYD," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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TO

EDMUND YATES, ESQ.,

This Story is dedicated,

IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE FACT THAT HE WAS AMONG

THOSE EARLY FRIENDS WHOSE HEARTILY

EXPRESSED OPINION

GAVE ENCOURAGEMENT TO

THE AUTHOR.

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ELEANOR'S VICTORY.

CHAPTER I.

GOING HOME.

THE craggy cliffs upon the Norman coast looked something like the terraced walls and turreted roofs of a ruined city in the hot afternoon sunshine, as the "Empress" steamer sped swiftly onward toward Dieppe. At least they looked thus in the eyes of a very young lady, who stood alone on the deck of the steam-packet, with yearning eyes fixed upon that foreign shore.

It was four o'clock upon a burning August afternoon in the year 1853. The steamer was fast approaching the harbour. Several moustachioed gentlemen, of various ages, costumes, and manners, were busy getting together carpet-bags, railway-rugs, camp-stools, newspapers, and

umbrellas; preparatory to that eager rush towards the shore by which marine voyagers are apt to testify their contempt for Neptune, when they have no longer need of his service or fear of his vengeance. Two or three English families were collected in groups, holding guard over small mounds or barrows of luggage, having made all preparation for landing at first sight of the Norman shore dim in the distance; and of course about two hours too soon.

Several blooming young English damsels, gathered under maternal wings, were looking forward to sea-bathing in a foreign watering-place. The Établissement des Bains had not yet been built, and Dieppe was not so popular, perhaps, among English pleasure-seekers as it now is. There were several comfortable-looking British families on board the steamer, but of all the friendly matrons and pretty daughters assembled on the deck, there seemed no one in any way connected with that lonely young lady who leant against the bulwark with a cloak across her arm and a rather shabby carpet-bag at her feet.

She was very young — indeed of that age which in the other sex is generally called the period of hobbledehoyhood. There was more

ankle to be seen below the hem of her neat muslin frock than is quite consistent with elegance of attire in a young lady of fifteen; but as the ankle so revealed was rounded and slender, it would have been hypercritical to have objected to the shortness of the skirt, which had evidently been outgrown by its wearer.

Then, again, this lonely traveller was not only young but pretty. In spite of the shortness of her frock and the shabbiness of her straw bonnet, it was impossible for the most spiteful of the British misses to affirm the contrary. She was very pretty; so pretty that it was a pleasure to look at her, in her unconscious innocence, and to think how beautiful she would be by-and-by, when that bright, budding, girlish loveliness bloomed out in its womanly splendour.

Her skin was fair but pale,—not a sentimental or sickly pallor, but a beautiful alabaster clearness of tint. Her eyes were grey, large, and dark, or rendered dark by the shadow of long black lashes. I would rather not catalogue her other features too minutely; for though they were regular, and even beautiful, there is something low and material in all the other features as compared to the eyes. Her hair was of a soft

golden brown, bright and rippling like a sunlit river. The brightness of that luxuriant hair, the light in her grey eyes, and the vivacity of a very beautiful smile, made her face seem almost luminous as she looked at you. It was difficult to imagine that she could ever look unhappy. She seemed an animated, radiant, and exuberant creature, who made an atmosphere of brightness and happiness about her. Other girls of her age would have crept to a corner of the deck, perhaps to hide their loneliness, or would have clung to the outer fringe of one of the family groups, making believe not to be alone; but this young lady had taken her stand boldly against the bulwark, choosing the position from which she might soonest hope to see Dieppe harbour, and apparently quite indifferent to observation, though many a furtive glance was cast towards the tall but girlish figure and the handsome profile so sharply defined against a blue background of summer sky.

But there was nothing unfeminine in all this; nothing bold or defiant; it was only the innocent unconsciousness of a light-hearted girl, ignorant of any perils which could assail her loneliness, and fearless in her ignorance. Throughout the

brief sea-voyage she had displayed no symptoms of shyness or perplexity. She had suffered none of the tortures common to many travellers in their marine experiences. She had not been sea-sick; and indeed she did not look like a person who could be subject to any of the common ills this weak flesh inherits. You could almost as easily have pictured to yourself the Goddess Hygeia suffering from a bilious headache, or Hebe laid up with the influenza, as this auburn-haired, grey-eyed young lady under any phase of mortal suffering. Eyes dim in the paroxysms of sea-sickness, had looked almost spitefully towards this happy, radiant creature, as she flitted hither and thither about the deck, courting the balmy ocean breezes that made themselves merry with her rippling hair. Lips, blue with suffering, had writhed as their owners beheld the sandwiches which this young schoolgirl devoured, the stale buns, the oval raspberry tarts, the hideous, bilious, revolting three-cornered puffs which she produced at different stages of the voyage from her shabby carpet-bag.

She had an odd volume of a novel, and a long, dreary desert of crochet-work, whose white-cotton monotony was only broken by occasional dingy

oases bearing witness of the worker's dirty hands; they were such pretty hands, too, that it was a shame they should ever be dirty; and she had a bunch of flabby, faded flowers, sheltered by a great fan-like shield of newspaper; and she had a smelling-bottle, which she sniffed at perpetually, though she had no need of any such restorative, being as fresh and bright from first to last as the sea breezes themselves, and as little subject to any marine malady as the Lurleis whose waving locks could scarcely have been yellower than her own.

I think, if the feminine voyagers on board the "Empress" were cruel to this solitary young traveller in not making themselves friendly with her in her loneliness, the unkindness must be put down very much to that unchristian frame of mind in which people who are sea-sick are apt to regard those who are not. This bouncing, bright-faced girl seemed to have little need of kindness from the miserable sufferers around her. So she was left to wander about the deck; now reading three pages of her novel; now doing half-a-dozen stitches of her work; now talking to the man at the wheel, in spite of all injunctions to the contrary; now making herself ac-

quainted with stray pet dogs; always contented, always happy; and no one troubled himself about her.

It was only now, when they were nearing Dieppe, that one of the passengers, an elderly, grey-headed Englishman, spoke to her.

"You are very anxious to arrive," he said, smiling at her eager face.

"Oh, yes, very anxious, sir. We are nearly there, are we not?"

"Yes, we shall enter the harbour presently. You will have some one to meet you there, I suppose?"

"Oh, no," the young lady answered, lifting her arched brown eyebrows, "not at Dieppe. Papa will meet me at Paris; but he could never come all the way to Dieppe, just to take me back to Paris. He could never afford such an expense as that."

"No, to be sure; and you know no one at Dieppe?"

"Oh, no, I don't know any one in all France, except papa."

Her face, bright as it was even in repose, was lit up with a new brightness as she spoke of her father.

"You are very fond of your papa, I think," the Englishman said.

"Oh, yes, I love him very, very much. I have not seen him for more than a year. The journey costs so much between England and France, and I have been at school near London, at Brixton; I dare say you know Brixton; but I am going to France now, for good."

"Indeed! You seem very young to leave school."

"But I'm not going to leave school," the young lady answered, eagerly. "I am going to a very expensive school in Paris, to finish my education; and then—"

She paused here, hesitating and blushing a little.

"And then what?"

"I am going to be a governess. Papa is not rich. He has no fortune now."

"He has had a fortune, then?"

"He has had three."

The young lady's grey eyes were lit up with a certain look of triumph as she said this.

"He has been very extravagant, poor dear," she continued, apologetically; "and he has spent three fortunes, altogether. But he has been

always so courted and admired, you know, that it is not to be wondered at. He knew the Prince Regent, and Mr. Sheridan, and Mr. Brummel, and the Duke of York, and—oh, all sorts of people, ever so intimately; and he was a member of the Beefsteak Club, and wore a silver gridiron in his button-hole, and he is the most delightful man in society, even now, though he is very old."

"Very old! And you are so young."

The Englishman looked almost incredulously at his animated companion.

"Yes, I am papa's youngest child. He has been married twice. I have no real brothers and sisters. I have only half-brothers and sisters, who don't really and truly care for me, you know. How should they? They were grown up when I was born, and I have scarcely ever seen them. I have only papa in all the world."

"You have no mother, then?"

"No; mamma died when I was three years old."

The "Empress" packet was entering the harbour by this time. The grey-headed Englishman went away to look after his portmanteaus and hat-boxes, but he returned presently to the fair-haired school-girl.

"Will you let me help you with your luggage?" he said. "I will go and look after it if you will tell me for what to inquire."

"You are very kind. I have only one box. It is directed to Miss Vane, Paris."

"Very well, Miss Vane, I will go and find your box. Stay," he said, taking out his card-case, "this is my name, and if you will permit me, I will see you safely to Paris."

"Thank you, sir. You are very kind."

The young lady accepted her new friend's service as frankly as it was offered. He had grey hair, and in that one particular at least resembled her father. That was almost enough to make her like him.

There was the usual confusion and delay at the Custom-house—a little squabbling and a good deal of bribery; but everything was managed, upon the whole, pretty comfortably. Most of the passengers dropped in at the Hôtel de l'Europe, or some of the other hotels upon the stony quay; a few hurried off to the market-place, to stare at the cathedral church of Saint Jacques, or the great statue of Abraham Duquesne, the rugged sea-king, with broad-brimmed hat and waving plumes, high boots and flowing hair, and to buy peaches

and apricots of the noisy market women. Others wandered in the slimy and slippery fish-market, fearfully and wonderingly contemplative of those hideous conger-eels, dog-fish, and other piscatorial monstrosities which seem peculiar to Dieppe. Miss Vane and her companion strolled into the dusky church of Saint Jacques by a little wooden door in a shady nook of the edifice. A few solitary women were kneeling here and there, half-hidden behind their high-backed rush chairs. A fisherman was praying upon the steps of a little chapel, in the solemn obscurity.

"I have never been here before," Miss Vane whispered. "I came by Dover and Calais, the last time; but this way is so much cheaper, and I almost think it nicer, for the journey's so short from London to Newhaven, and I don't mind the long sea voyage a bit. Thank you for bringing me to see this cathedral."

Half-an-hour after this the two travellers were seated in a first-class carriage, with other railway passengers, French and English, hurrying through the fair Norman landscape.

Miss Vane looked out at the bright hills and woods, the fruitful orchards, and white-roofed cottages, so villa-like, fantastical, and beautiful;

and her face brightened with the brightening of the landscape under the hot radiance of the sun. The grey-headed gentleman felt a quiet pleasure in watching that earnest, hopeful, candid face; the grey eyes, illumined with gladness; the parted lips, almost tremulous with delight, as the sunny panorama glided by the open window.

The quiet old bachelor's heart had been won by his companion's frank acceptance of his simple service.

"Another girl of her age would have been as frightened of a masculine stranger as of a wild beast," he thought, "and would have given herself all manner of missish airs; but this young damsel smiles in my face, and trusts me with almost infantile simplicity. I hope her father is a good man. I don't much like that talk of Sheridan and Beau Brummel and the Beefsteak Club. No very good school for fathers, that, I should fancy. I wish her mother had been alive, poor child. I hope she is going to a happy home, and a happy future."

The train stopped at Rouen, and Miss Vane accepted a cup of coffee and some *brioches* from her companion. The red August sunset was melting into grey mistiness by this time, and the

first shimmer of the moonlight was silvery on the water as they crossed the Seine and left the lighted city behind them. The grey-headed Englishman fell asleep soon after this, and before long there was a low chorus of snoring, masculine and feminine, audible in the comfortable carriage; only broken now and then, when the train stopped with a jerk at some fantastic village that looked like a collection of Swiss toy cottages in the dim summer night.

But, let these matter-of-fact people snore and slumber as they might, there was no such thing as sleep for Eleanor Vane. It would have been utter sacrilege to have slept in the face of all that moonlighted beauty, to have been carried sleeping through that fairy landscape. The eager school-girl's watchful eyes drank in the loveliness of every hill and valley; the low scattered woodland; the watering streams; and that perplexing Seine, which the rumbling carriage crossed so often with a dismal hollow sound in the stillness of the night.

No; Miss Vane's bright grey eyes were not closed once in that evening journey; and at last, when the train entered the great Parisian station, when all the trouble and confusion of arrival began

—that wearisome encounter of difficulty which makes cowardly travellers wish the longest journey longer than it is—the young lady's head was thrust out of the window, and her eager eyes wandered hither and thither amongst the faces of the crowd.

Yes, he was there—her father. That white-haired old man, with the gold-headed cane, and the aristocratic appearance. She pointed him out eagerly to her fellow-passenger.

"That is papa—you see,—the handsome man. He is coming this way, but he doesn't see us. Oh, let me out, please; let me go to him!"

She trembled in her eagerness, and her fair face flushed crimson with excitement. She forgot her carpet-bag, her novel, her crochet, her smelling-bottle, her cloak, her parasol—all her paraphernalia: and left her companion to collect them as best he might. She was out of the carriage and in her father's arms she scarcely knew how. The platform seemed deserted all in a moment, for the passengers had rushed away to a great dreary *salle d'attente*, there to await the inspection of their luggage. Miss Vane, her fellow-traveller, and her father were almost alone, and she was looking up at the old man's face in the lamplight.

"Papa, dear, papa, darling, how well you are looking; as well as ever; better than ever, I think!"

Her father drew himself up proudly. He was past seventy years of age, but he was a very handsome man. His beauty was of that patrician type which loses little by age. He was tall and broad-chested, erect as a Grenadier, but not fat. The Prince Regent might become corpulent, and lay himself open to the insolent sneers of his sometime boon companion and friend; but Mr. George Mowbray Vandeleur Vane held himself on his guard against that insidious foe which steals away the graces of so many elderly gentlemen. Mr. Vane's aristocratic bearing imparted such a stamp to his clothes, that it was not easy to see the shabbiness of his garments; but those garments were shabby. Carefully as they had been brushed, they bore the traces of that slow decay which is not to be entirely concealed, whatever the art of the wearer.

Miss Vane's travelling companion saw all this. He had been so much interested by the young lady's frank and fearless manner, that he would fain have lingered in the hope of learning something of her father's character; but he felt that he had no excuse for delaying his departure.

"I will wish you good night, now, Miss Vane," he said, kindly, "since you are safely restored to your papa."

Mr. Vane lifted his grey eyebrows, looked at his daughter interrogatively; rather suspiciously, the traveller thought.

"Oh, papa, dear," the young lady answered, in reply to that questioning look, "this gentleman was on board the boat with me, and he has been so very kind."

She searched in her pocket for the card which her acquaintance had given her, and produced that document, rather limp and crumpled. Her father looked at it, murmured the name inscribed upon it twice or thrice, as if trying to attach some aristocratic association thereto, but evidently failed in doing so.

"I have not the honour of—a—haw—knowing this name sir," he said, lifting his hat stiffly about half a yard from his silvered head; "but for your courtesy and kindness to my child, I hope you will accept my best thanks. I was prevented by important business of—a—haw—not altogether undiplomatic character—from crossing the Channel to fetch my daughter; and—aw—also—prevented from sending my servant—by—

aw—I thank you for your politeness, sir. You are a stranger, by the way. Can I do anything for you in Paris? Lord Cowley is my very old friend; any service that I can render you in that quarter—I—"

The traveller bowed and smiled.

"Thank you very much," he said, "I am no stranger in Paris. I will wish you good night; good night, Miss Vane."

But Mr. Vane was not going to let his daughter's friend off so easily. He produced his card-case, murmured more pompous assurances of his gratitude, and tendered further offers of patronage to the quiet traveller, who found something rather oppressive in Mr. Vane's civility. But it was all over at last, and the old man led his daughter off to look for the trunk which contained all her worldly possessions.

The stranger looked wistfully after the father and child.

"I hope she may have a happy future," he thought, rather despondingly; "the old man is poor and pompous. He tells lies which bring hot blushes into his daughter's beautiful face. I am very sorry for her."

CHAPTER II.

THE ENTRESOL IN THE RUE DE L'ARCHEVÊQUE.

Mr. Vane took his daughter away from the station in one of those secondary and cheaper vehicles which are distinguished by the discriminating Parisian by some mysterious difference of badge. The close, stifling carriage rattled over the uneven stones of long streets which were unfamiliar to Eleanor Vane, until it emerged into the full glory of the lighted Boulevard. The light-hearted school-girl could not suppress a cry of rapture as she looked once more at the broad thoroughfare, the dazzling lamps, the crowd, the theatres, the cafés, the beauty and splendour, although she had spent her summer holiday in Paris only a year before.

"It seems so beautiful again, papa," she said, "just as if I'd never seen it before; and I'm to stop here now, and never, never to leave you again, to go away for such a cruel distance. You

don't know how unhappy I've been, sometimes, papa dear. I wouldn't tell you then, for fear of making you uneasy; but I can tell you now, now that it's all over."

"Unhappy!" gasped the old man, clenching his fist; "they've not been unkind to you—they've not dared—"

"Oh, no, dearest father. They've been very, very good. I was quite a favourite, papa. Yes, though there were so many rich girls in the school, and I was only a half-boarder, I was quite a favourite with Miss Bennett and Miss Sophia; though I know I was careless and lazy sometimes, not on purpose, you know, papa, for I tried hard to get on with my education, for your sake, darling. No, everybody was very kind to me, papa; but I used to think sometimes how far I was from you; what miles and miles and miles of sea and land there were between us, and that if you should be ill—I—"

Eleanor Vane broke down, and her father clasped her in his arms, and cried over her silently. The tears came with very little provocation to the old man's handsome blue eyes. He was of that sanguine temperament which to the last preserves the fondest delusions of youth. At

seventy-five years of age he hoped and dreamed and deluded himself as foolishly as he had done at seventeen. His sanguine temperament had been for ever leading him astray for more than sixty years. Severe judges called George Vane a liar; but perhaps his shallow romances, his pitiful boasts, were more often highly-coloured and poetical versions of the truth, than actual falsehood.

It was past twelve o'clock when the carriage drove away from the lights and splendour into the darkness of a labyrinth of quiet streets behind the Madeleine. The Rue de l'Archevêque was one of these dingy and quiet streets, very narrow, very close and stifling in the hot August midnight. The vehicle stopped abruptly at a corner, before a little shop, the shutters of which were closed, of course, at this hour.

"It is a butcher's shop, I am sorry to say, my love," Mr. Vane said, apologetically, as he handed his daughter on to the pavement; "but I find myself very comfortable here, and it is conveniently adjacent to the Boulevards."

The old man paid the driver, who had deposited mademoiselle's box upon the threshold of the little door beside the butcher's shop. The *pour-*

boire was not a very large one, but Mr. Vane bestowed it with the air of a prince. He pushed open the low door, and took his daughter into a narrow passage. There was no porter or portress, for the butcher's shop and the apartments belonging to it were abnormal altogether; but there was a candle and box of matches on a shelf in a corner of the steep corkscrew staircase. The driver carried Eleanor's box as far as the entresol in consideration of his *pour-boire,* but departed while Mr. Vane was opening the door of an apartment facing the staircase.

The entresol consisted of three little rooms, opening one out of another, and so small and low that Miss Vane almost fancied herself in a doll's house. Every article of furniture in the stifling little apartment bore the impress of its nationality. Tawdry curtains of figured damask, resplendent with dirty tulips and monster roses, tarnished ormolu mouldings, a gilded clock with a cracked dial and a broken shade, a pair of rickety bronze candlesticks, a couple of uncompromising chairs covered with dusty green velvet and relieved by brass-headed nails, and a square table with a long trailing cover of the same material as the curtains, completed the adornments

of the sitting-room. The bed-chambers were smaller, closer, and hotter. Voluminous worsted curtains falling before the narrow windows, and smothering the little beds, made the stifling atmosphere yet more stifling. The low ceilings seemed to rest on the top of poor Eleanor's head. She had been accustomed to large airy rooms, and broad uncurtained open windows.

"How hot it is here, papa," she said, drawing a long breath.

"It always is hot in Paris at this time of year, my dear," Mr. Vane answered; "the rooms are small, you see, but convenient. That is to be your bed-room, my love," he added, indicating one of the little chambers.

He was evidently habituated to Parisian lodging-houses, and saw no discomfort in the tawdry grandeur, the shabby splendour, the pitiful attempt to substitute scraps of gilding and patches of velvet for the common necessaries and decencies of life.

"And now let me look at you, my dear; let me look at you, Eleanor."

George Mowbray Vane set the candlestick upon the rusty velvet cover of the low mantelpiece, and drew his daughter towards him. She

had thrown off her bonnet and loose grey cloak, and stood before her father in her scanty muslin frock, with all her auburn hair hanging about her face and shoulders, and glittering in the dim light of that one scrap of wax candle.

"My pet, how beautiful you have grown, how beautiful!" the old man said, with an accent of fond tenderness. "We'll teach Mrs. Bannister a lesson some of these days, Eleanor. Yes, *our* turn will come, my love; I know that I shall die a rich man."

Miss Vane was accustomed to hear this remark from her father. She inherited something of his sanguine nature, and she loved him very dearly, so she may be forgiven if she believed in his vague visions of future grandeur. She had never seen anything in her life but chaotic wrecks of departed splendour, confusion, debt, and difficulty. She had not been called upon to face poverty in the fair hand-to-hand struggle which ennobles and elevates the sturdy wrestler in the battle of life. No, she had rather been compelled to play at hide-and-seek with the grim enemy. She had never gone out into the open, and looked her foe full in the eyes, hardy, resolute, patient, and steadfast. She was familiar with all those

debasing tricks and pitiful subterfuges whereby the weak and faint-hearted seek to circumvent the enemy; but she had never been taught the use of those measures by which he may be honestly beaten.

The Mrs. Bannister of whom George Vane had spoken, was one of his elder daughters, who had been very, very ungrateful to him, he declared; and who now in his old age doled him out the meagre allowance which enabled him to occupy an entresol over a butcher's shop, and dine daily at one of the cheap restaurants in the Palais Royal.

Mr. Vane was wont to lament his daughter's cruel lack of affection in very bitter language, freely interspersed with quotations from "King Lear;" indeed I believe he considered his case entirely parallel with that of the injured British monarch and father; ignoring the one rather important fact that, whereas Lear's folly had been the too generous division of his own fortune between his recreant daughters, *his* weakness had been the reckless waste and expenditure of the portions which his children had inherited from their mother.

Mrs. Bannister, instigated thereto by her husband, had protested some years before against the

several acts of folly and extravagance by which the fortune which ought to have been hers had been fooled away. She declined to allow her father more than the pittance alluded to above; although, as she was now a rich widow, and of course entirely her own mistress, she might have done much more.

"Yes, my darling," Mr. Vane said, as he proudly contemplated his youngest child's beauty, "we will turn the tables upon Mrs. Bannister and the rest of them, yet, please God. My Benjamin; my youngest, brightest darling; we'll teach them a lesson. They may poke their old father away in a foreign lodging, and stint him of money for any little innocent pleasure; but the day will come, my love, the day will come!"

The old man nodded his head two or three times with solemn significance. The sanguine, impulsive nature, dwarfed and fettered by the cruel bonds of poverty, was too elastic to be entirely repressed even by those galling chains; and having hoped all his life, and having enjoyed such successes and good fortune as fall to the lot of very few men, he went on hoping in his old age, blindly confident that some sudden revolution in the wheel of life would lift him out of

his obscurity and set him again on the pinnacle he had once occupied so proudly.

He had had a host of friends and many children, and he had squandered more than one fortune, not being any more careful of other people's money than of his own; and now, in his poverty and desolation, the child of his old age was the only one who clung to him and loved him and believed in him; the only one whom he loved, perhaps, truly and unreservedly, though he wept frequently over the ingratitude of the others. It may be that Eleanor was the only one whom he could love with any comfort to himself, because the only one he had never injured.

"But, papa, dear," this youngest and best loved of the old man's children pleaded gently, "Mrs. Bannister, Hortensia, has been very good—has she not?—in sending the money for my education at Madame Marly's, where she was finished herself. That was very generous of her, wasn't it, papa?"

Mr. Vane shook his head, and lifted his grey eyebrows with a deprecating expression.

"Hortensia Bannister cannot perform a generous act in a generous manner, my dear. You

recognise the viper by the reptile's sting: you may recognise Hortensia in pretty much the same manner. She gives, but she insults the recipients of her—ahem—bounty. Shall I read you her letter, Eleanor?"

"If you please, dear papa."

The young lady had seated herself, in a somewhat hoydenish manner, upon the elbow of her father's chair, and had wound her soft round arm about his neck. She loved him and believed in him. The world which had courted and admired him while he had money and could boast such acquaintance as the Prince and Sheridan, Sir Francis Burdett, Lord Castlereagh, Mr. Pitt, and the Duke of York, had fallen away from him of late; and the few old associates who yet remained of that dead-and-gone cycle were apt to avoid him, influenced perhaps by the recollection of small loans of an occasional five-pound note, and "a little silver," which had not been repaid. Yes, the world had fallen away from George Mowbray Vandeleur Vane, once of Vandeleur Park, Cheshire, and Mowbray Castle, near York. The tradesmen who had helped him to squander his money had let him get very deep in their books before they closed those cruel ledgers, and

stopped all supplies. He had existed for a long time—he had lived as a gentleman, he said himself—upon the traditions of the past, the airy memories of the fortunes he had wasted. But this was all over now, and he had emigrated to the city in which he had played the Grand Seigneur in those glorious early days of the Restoration, and where he was compelled to lead a low and vulgar life, disgracing himself by petti-fogging ready-money dealings, utterly degrading to a gentleman.

He could not bring himself to own that he was better and happier in this new life, and that it was pleasant to be able to walk erect and defiant upon the Boulevards, rather than to be compelled to plunge down dark alleys, and dive into sinuous byways, for the avoidance of importunate creditors, as he had been in free England.

He took his wealthy daughter's letter from the breast-pocket of his coat; a fashionable coat, though shabby now, for it had been made for him by a sentimental German tailor, who had wept over his late patron's altered fortunes, and given him credit for a suit of clothes. That compassionate German tailor never expected to be paid; and the clothes were a benefaction, a gift as

purely and generously given as any Christian dole offered in the holy name of charity; but Mr. Vane was pleased with the fiction of an expected payment, and would have revolted against the idea of receiving a present from the good-natured tradesman.

The letter from Hortensia Bannister was not a long one. It was written in sharp and decisive paragraphs, and in a neat, firm hand. Rather a cruel-looking hand, Eleanor Vane thought.

The old man put a double gold eyeglass over his nose, and began to read.

Hyde Park Gardens, August, 1853.

"My dear Father,—In compliance with your repeated solicitations I have determined upon taking measures by which I hope the future welfare of your youngest daughter may be secured.

"I must, however, remind you that Eleanor Vane and I are the children of different mothers; that she has, therefore, less claim upon me than a sister usually has; and I freely confess I never heard of one sister being called upon to provide for another.

"You must also remember that I never enter-

tained any degree of friendship or affection for Eleanor's mother, who was much below you in station, and whom you married in direct opposition to myself and my sisters—"

Eleanor started; she was too impetuous to listen quite passively to this letter. Her father felt the sudden movement of the arm about his neck.

"Your mother was an angel, my dear," he said; "and this woman is—never mind what. My daughters chose to give themselves airs to your poor mother because she had been their governess, and because her father had failed as a sugar-broker."

He went back to the letter, groping nervously for the place at which he had left off, with the point of his well-shaped finger—

"But you tell me that you have no power to make any provision whatsoever for your daughter; and that, unless I assist you, this unhappy girl may, in the event of your death, be flung penniless upon the world, imperfectly educated, and totally incompetent to get her living."

"She speaks of my death very freely," the old man murmured, "but she's right enough. I shan't trouble anybody long, my dear; I shan't trouble anybody long."

The tender arms wound themselves more closely about George Vane's neck.

"Papa, darling," the soft voice whispered, "you have never troubled *me*. Don't go on with that horrid letter, papa. We won't accept any favours from such a woman."

"Yes, yes, my love, for your sake; if I stoop, it is for your sake, Eleanor."

The old man went on reading.

"Under these circumstances," the writer continued, "I have come to the following determination. I will give you a hundred pounds, to be paid to Madame Marly, who knows you, and has received a great deal of money from you for my education and that of my sisters, and who will, therefore, be inclined to receive Eleanor upon advantageous terms. For this sum of money Madame Marly will, I feel assured, consent to prepare my half-sister for the situation of governess in a gentleman's family; that is, of course, premising that Eleanor has availed herself conscientiously of the advantages afforded her by her residence with the Misses Bennett.

"I shall write to Madame Marly by this post, using my best influence with her for Eleanor's benefit; and, should I receive a favourable reply

to this letter, I will immediately send you an order for a hundred pounds, to be paid by you to Madame Marly.

"I do this in order that you may not appear to my old instructress—who remembers you as a rich man—in the position of a pauper; but in thus attempting to spare your feelings, and perhaps my own, I fear that I run some risk.

"Let me therefore warn you that this money is the last I will ever pay for my half-sister's benefit. Squander or misuse it if you please. You have robbed me often, and would not perhaps hesitate to do so again. But bear in mind, that this time it is Eleanor you will rob and not me.

"The only chance she will have of completing her education is the chance I now give her. Rob her of this and you rob her of an honourable future. Deprive her of this and you make yourself answerable for any misfortunes which may befall her when you are dead and gone.

"Forgive me if I have spoken harshly, or even undutifully; my excuse lies in your past follies. I have spoken strongly because I wished to make a strong impression, and I believe that I have acted for the best.

"Once for all, remember that I will attend to

no future solicitations on Eleanor's behalf. If she makes good use of the help I now afford her, I may perhaps be tempted to render her further services—unsolicited—in the future. If she or you make a bad use of this one chance, I wash my hands of all concern in your future miseries.

"The money will be made payable at Messrs. Blount's, Rue de la Paix.

"I trust you attend the Protestant Church in the Rue Rivoli.

"With best wishes for your welfare, temporal and eternal, "I remain, my dear father,

"Your affectionate daughter,

"HORTENSIA BANNISTER."

George Vane burst into tears as he finished the letter. How cruelly she had stabbed him, this honourable, conscientious daughter, whom he had robbed certainly, but in a generous, magnanimous, reckless fashion, that made robbery rather a princely virtue than a sordid vice. How cruelly the old heart was lacerated by that bitter letter!

"As if I would touch the money," cried Mr. Vane, elevating his trembling hands to the low ceiling with a passionate and tragic gesture. "Have I been such a wretch to you, Eleanor,

that this woman should accuse me of wishing to snatch the bread from your innocent lips?"

"Papa, papa!"

"Have I been such an unnatural father, such a traitor, liar, swindler, and cheat, that my own daughter should say these things to me?"

His voice rose higher with each sentence, and the tears streamed down his wrinkled cheeks.

Eleanor tried to kiss away those tears; but he pushed her from him with passionate vehemence.

"Go away from me, my child, I am a wretch, a robber, a scoundrel, a ——"

"No, no, no, papa," cried Eleanor; "you are all that is good, you have always been good to me, dear, dear papa."

"By what right, then, does this woman insult me with such a letter as that?" asked the old man, drying his eyes, and pointing to the crumpled letter which he had flung upon the ground.

"She has no right, papa," answered Eleanor. "She is a wicked, cruel woman. But we'll send back her money. I'd rather go out into the world at once, papa, and work for you: I'd rather be a dressmaker. I could learn soon if I tried very hard. I do know a little about dressmaking.

I made this dress, and it fits very well, only I cut out both the backs for one side, and both sleeves for one arm, and that wasted the stuff, you know, and made the skirt a little scanty. I'd rather do anything, papa, than accept this money,—I would indeed. I don't want to go to this grand Parisian school, except to be near you, papa, darling. That was the only thing I ever cared for. The Miss Bennetts would take me as a pupil teacher, and give me fifteen pounds a-year, and I'd send every shilling of it to you, papa, and then you needn't live over a wretched shop where the meat smells nasty in the warm weather. We won't take the money, will we, papa?"

The old man shook his head, and made a motion with his lips and throat, as if he had been gulping down some bitter draught.

"Yes, my dear," he said, in a tone of ineffable resignation, "for your sake I would suffer many humiliations; for your sake I will endure this. We will take no notice of this woman's letter; though I could write her a reply that—but no matter. We will let her insolence pass, and she shall never know how keenly it has stung me here!"

He tapped his breast as he spoke, and the tears rose again to his eyes.

"We will accept this money, Eleanor," he continued, "we will accept her bounty; and the day may come when you will have ample power to retaliate—ample power, my dear. She has called me a thief, Eleanor," exclaimed the old man, suddenly returning to his own wrongs,—"a thief! My own daughter has called me a thief, and accused me of the baseness of robbing you."

"Papa, papa, darling!"

"As if your father could rob you of this money, Eleanor; as if I could touch a penny of it. No, so help me, Heaven! not a penny of it to save me from starving."

His head sank forward upon his breast, and he sat for some minutes muttering to himself in broken sentences, as if almost unconscious of his daughter's presence. In that time he looked older than he had looked at any moment since his daughter had met him at the station. Watching him now, wistfully and sorrowfully, Eleanor Vane saw that her father was indeed an old man, vacillating and weak of purpose, and with ample need of all the compassionate tenderness, the fond affection, which overflowed her girlish heart as she

looked at him. She knelt down on the slippery oaken floor at his feet, and took his tremulous hand in both of hers.

He started as she touched him, and looked at her.

"My darling," he cried, "you've had nothing to eat; you've been nearly an hour in the house, and you've had nothing to eat. But I've not forgotten you, Nell; you'll find I've not forgotten you."

He rose from his chair, and went over to a little cupboard in the wall, from which he took a couple of plates and tumblers, some knives and forks, and two or three parcels wrapped in white paper, and neatly tied with narrow red tape. He put these on the table, and going a second time to the cupboard produced a pint bottle of Burgundy, in a basket; very dusty and cobwebby; and therefore, no doubt, very choice.

The white paper parcels contained very recherché comestibles. A slender wedge of truffled turkey, some semi-transparent slices of German sausage, and an open plum tart, with a great deal of rich ruby coloured syrup, and an utterly uneatable crust.

Miss Vane partook very freely of this little

collation, praising her father for his goodness and indulgence as she ate the simple feast he had prepared for her. But she did not like the Burgundy in the dusty basket, and preferred to drink some water out of one of the toilette bottles.

Her father, however, enjoyed the pint of good wine, and recovered his equanimity under its generous influence. He had never been a drunkard; he had indeed one of those excitable natures which cannot endure the influence of strong drinks, and a very little wine had considerable effect upon him.

He talked a good deal, therefore, to his daughter, told her some of his delusive hopes in the future, tried to explain some of the plans which he had formed for his and her advancement, and was altogether very happy and social. The look of age, which had been so strong upon him half an hour before, faded out like a grey morning shadow under the broadening sunlight. He was a young man again; proud, hopeful, reckless; handsome; ready to run through three more fortunes, if they should fall to his lot.

It was past two o'clock when Eleanor Vane lay down, thoroughly exhausted, but not weary—she had one of those natures which seem never to

grow weary—to fall asleep for the first time in four-and-twenty hours.

Her father did not quite so quickly fall into a peaceful slumber. He lay awake for upwards of an hour, tumbling and tossing to and fro upon the narrow spring mattress, and muttering to himself.

And even in his sleep, though the early summer dawn was grey in the room when he fell into a fitful and broken slumber, the trouble of his eldest daughter's letter was heavy upon him, for every now and then he muttered, disjointedly,—

"Thief—swindler! As if—as if—I would—rob —my own daughter."

CHAPTER III.

THE STORY OF THE PAST.

THE history of George Mowbray Vandeleur Vane was the history of many men whose lot it was to shine in that brilliant orbit, of which George, Prince Regent, was the ruling star. Around that dazzling royal planet how many smaller lights revolved, twinkling in humble emulation of their prince's glory. What were fortune, friends, children, wives or creditors, when weighed in the balance, if the royal favour, the princely smile hung on the other side of the scale? If George the Fourth was pleased to bring ruin upon himself and his creditors, how should his friends and associates do less? Looking backward at the spurious glitter, the mock splendour, the hollow delight of that wonderful age which is so near us in point of time, so far away from us by reason of the wide differences which divide to-day from that foolish yesterday, we can of course afford to be

very wise, and can clearly see what a very witches' sabbath was that long revelry in which the fourth George of England led the dance. But who shall doubt that the dancers themselves saw the fantastic caperings of their leader in a very different light, and looked upon their model as worthy of all mortal praise and imitation.

The men of that frivolous era seem to have abandoned themselves to unmanly weakness, and followed the fashions set them by the fat and pale-faced Royal Adonis, as blindly as the women of to-day emulate the Imperial caprices of the Tuileries, sacrificing themselves as burnt offerings to the Moloch of fashion, in obedience to the laws made by a lady who lives in a palace; and who, when she wears her silken robe three yards in length and six in circumference, can scarcely be expected to foresee the nervous tortures by-and-by to be endured by Mr. John Smith, of Peckham Rye, whose wife will insist on having a hoop and train *à l'Oojénee*, and sweeping her superabundant skirts into the fender and across the back of the grate every time she steers her difficult way about the worthy Smith's fourteen feet by twelve front parlour.

Yes, if Cleopatra melts pearls in her wine, and

sails in a galley of gold, we must have sham jewels to dissolve in our inferior vintages, and sham gold to adorn our galleys. If Pericles, or Charles, or George, affects splendour and ruin, the prince's devoted subjects must ruin themselves also, never letting their master see anything but smiling faces amid the general wreck, and utterly heedless of such minor considerations as wives and children, creditors and friends.

George Mowbray Vandeleur Vane ruined himself with a grace that was only second to that of his royal model. He began life with a fair estate left him by his father, and having contrived to squander the best part of his patrimony within a few years of his coming of age, was so lucky as to marry the only daughter and heiress of a rich banker, thereby acquiring a second fortune just at that critical moment when the first was on the verge of exhaustion. He was not a bad husband to the simple girl who loved and worshipped him with a foolishly confiding worship. It was not in his nature to be wilfully bad to anybody; for he was of a genial, generous spirit, with warm affections for those who pleased him and ministered to his happiness. He introduced his young wife to very brilliant people, and led her into

sacred and inner circles, whither her father the banker could never have taken her; but he squandered her money foolishly and recklessly. He broke down the bulwarks of parchment with which the lawyers had hoped to protect her fortune. He made light of the settlements which were to provide for the future of his children. They were only blooming and beautiful young creatures in cambric frocks and blue sashes; and surely, Mr. Vane urged, they had nothing to complain of, for hadn't they splendid apartments and costly dresses, nurses, governesses, masters, carriages, ponies, and indulgences of every kind? What did they want, then, or in what manner did he fail in his duty towards those innocent darlings? Had not his Royal Highness, the Duke of Kent himself, come to Vandeleur to stand sponsor for Edward George? Had not Hortensia Georgina received her second name after the beautiful Duchess of Devonshire, in whose lovely arms she had been dandled when only a fortnight old?

Were there any earthly honours or splendours, within the limit of reasonable desire, which George Vane had failed to procure for his wife and children?

The gentle lady was fain to answer this question in the negative, and to accept it for what it was not; namely, an answer to the questions *she* had ventured to ask touching the future of those unconscious children. Mr. Vane could always persuade his simple wife to sign away any of those parchment defences the lawyers had devised for her protection; and when, after an elegant little *tête-à-tête* dinner, in the arrangement of which the *chef* had displayed his most consummate skill, the affectionate husband produced a diamond bracelet or an emerald heart from its morocco casket, and clasped the jewel upon his wife's slender arm, or hung it round her delicate throat, with the tears glistening in his handsome blue eyes, gentle Margaret Vane forgot the sacrifices of the morning, and all those shadowy doubts which were wont to torment her when she contemplated the future.

Then, again, Mr. Vane had an unfailing excuse for present imprudence in the expectation of a third fortune, which was to come to him from his bachelor uncle and godfather, Sir Milwood Mowbray, of Mowbray Castle, York; so there were no vulgar retrenchments either at Vandeleur Park or in Berkeley Square, and when Sir Milwood's for-

tune did come, in the due course of life and death, to his nephew's hands, it only came just in time to stave off the ruin that threatened George Vane's household.

If Mr. Vane had then taken his wife's advice, all might have been well; but the Mowbray fortune seemed like the two other fortunes, quite inexhaustible, the sanguine gentleman forgetting that he was in debt to full half its amount. The French *chef* still prepared dinners which might have made Oude himself tremble for his laurels; the German governess and the Parisian lady's-maids still attended upon Mr. Vane's daughters; the old career of extravagance went on. George Vane carried his family to the Continent, and plunged them into new gaieties at the court of the restored Louis. He sent his daughters to the most expensive finishing school in Paris, that very Madame Marly's of whom mention has been made in the last chapter. He took them to Italy and Switzerland. He hired a villa by the Lake of Como; a chateau on the borders of Lucerne. He followed the footsteps of Byron and D'Orsay, Madame de Staël and Lady Blessington; he affected art, literature, and music. He indulged his children's every caprice, he gratified their

wildest fancies. It was only when the sons saw themselves penniless and professionless, with the great battle of life all before them, and with no weapons wherewith to fight; and the daughters found themselves left portionless, to win the best husbands they might in the matrimonial lottery: it was only at this crisis that these ungrateful children turned round upon poor, indulgent Lear, and reproached him for the extravagances they had helped him to perpetrate.

This was a cruelty which George Vane could never bring himself to comprehend. Had he denied them anything, these heartless children, that they should turn upon him now in his old age—it would have been rather a dangerous thing for anyone else to have alluded to his age, though he spoke freely enough of his grey hairs when bewailing his wrongs—and be angry with him, because he could not give them fortunes? This thanklessness was worse than a serpent's tooth. It was now that Mr. Vane began to quote "King Lear," piteously likening himself to that too confiding monarch.

But he was sixty years old now, and had lived his life. His gentle and trusting wife had died ten years before his money was gone, and of all

his four children there was not one who would say a word in his defence. The most affectionate and dutiful of them were only silent, and thought they did much in withholding their reproaches. So he let them go their ways, the two sons to fight the battle of life how they might—the two daughters to marry. They were both handsome and accomplished, and they married well. And being left quite alone in the world, with nothing but the traditions of a brilliant past, Mr. Vane united his misfortunes to those of a very beautiful girl who had been his daughter's governess, and who had fallen in love with his splendid graces, in the very simplicity of her heart, thinking his grey hairs more beautiful than the raven locks of meaner men.

Yes: George Vane possessed the gift of fascination in a dangerous degree, and his second wife loved and believed in him in the day of his decline, as entirely as his first wife had done in the brighter hours of his prosperity. She loved and trusted him. She bore with a life of perpetual debt and daily difficulty. She sacrificed herself to the mean shifts and petty stratagems of a dishonest existence. She, whose nature was truth itself, humiliated herself for her husband's sake,

and helped to play that pitiful, skulking game of hide-and-seek in which George Vane hoped to escape the honest struggles of poverty.

But she died young, worn out, perhaps, by these incessant miseries, and not able to draw consolation from the sham splendour and tinselly grandeur with which George Vane tried to invest his fallen state. She died within five years of her marriage, leaving a distracted and despairing old man as the sole guardian and protector of her only child.

This calamity was the bitterest blow that George Vane had ever been called upon to endure. He had loved his second wife, the wife of his poverty and humiliation, far more dearly than he had loved the obedient partner of his splendour and prosperity. She had been more to him a thousand times, this gentle girl who had so uncomplainingly accepted the hardships of her lot, because there had been no idle vanities, no hollow glories, no Prince's and Beefsteak Clubs, to stand between him and his love of her.

She was lost, and he remembered how little he had done to prove his affection for her. *She* had never reproached him; no word of upbraiding had ever crossed those tender lips. But how did he

know that he had not wronged her as cruelly as he had wronged those noisy children who had betrayed and deserted him?

He remembered how often he had slighted her advice, her loving counsel, so pure and true, so modestly offered, so gently spoken. He remembered how many humiliations he had forced upon her, how many falsehoods he had compelled her to tell; how often he had imposed upon her affection, suffering her to slave for him in his blind selfishness.

He could remember all these things now that she was gone, and that it was too late; too late to fall at her feet and tell her that he was all unworthy of her love and goodness; too late to offer her even such poor atonement for the past as penitence and tears. A hundred tokens of her in his poor lodgings recalled her a hundred times a day, bringing the tears into this poor broken-down mourner's eyes.

He did not need the presence of his little daughter, whose dark grey eyes looked at him like hers, whose auburn hair had the same golden glory that he had so often seen glistening in the sunshine as he sat lazily watching the low evening light upon his wife's drooping head. It seemed

only yesterday that she had stood in the window working for him—for him.

His affliction left him for a long time a broken old man. He did not care in this dull interval of despair to keep up those outward shams of prosperity which he had so persistently preserved. His fashionable coats and boots, treasured so carefully of late, were no longer objects of tender care and delight to him. He ceased to go out into that ignorant and careless world in which he could still play the fine gentleman. He shut himself up and abandoned himself to his grief, and it was a long time before his frivolous nature recovered the shock he had suffered. It is not to be wondered at that, in the agony of his bereavement, his youngest child became unspeakably dear to him. He had severed all the links which had bound him to the past, and to his elder children. His second marriage had made a new era in his life. If he thought of these elder children at all, it was only to remember that some of them were living in luxury, and that they ought to support him in his penniless old age. If he wrote to them, he wrote begging-letters, appealing to them in exactly the same spirit as he might have appealed

to the Duke of Wellington or Miss Burdett Coutts.

Yes; his youngest daughter usurped the place of an only child in the old man's heart. He indulged her as he had indulged the ungrateful elder children. He could not give her carriages and horses, liveried servants and splendid houses, but he could now and then prevail upon some weak-minded creditor to trust him, and would come home triumphant to his shabby lodging, bearing spoils for his beloved Eleanor. He would hire a brougham from a confiding livery-stable keeper, and would take his little girl for a drive in the country. He would get her fine dresses from the silk-mercers who had supplied his elder daughters, and he would compensate her for the shabby miseries of her every-day existence by chance flashes of radiance and glory.

Then, again, he would very often obtain small sums of money, loans from private friends, it may be, or fleeting treasures from a mysterious source, of which his innocent little daughter had no knowledge. So, for the first ten or eleven years of her life, Miss Vane's existence was chequered by sudden glimpses of abnormal wealth—wonderful feast days of luxury and extravagance—

which contrasted sharply with the dreary poverty of her ordinary experiences.

Thus it was no uncommon thing for this young lady to dine to-day in a tawdry and rather dirty parlour at Chelsea upon tea and red-herrings, and to-morrow to sit opposite her father in one of the sunny windows at the Crown and Sceptre, eating white-bait with the calm enjoyment of a connoisseur, and looking placidly on while Mr. Vane gave himself ducal airs to the waiters, and found fault with the icing of his sparkling hock. There was scarcely any extravagance which this little girl had not seen her father perpetrate. She had received from him a birthday present of a two-guinea wax doll, at the very time at which her schooling account, at a certain humble little seminary near Cheyne Walk, remained unpaid, and her education was brought to a dead lock by reason of this default. She had sighed for that golden-haired waxen plaything, and her father gave it to her because he loved her as he had always loved, weakly and foolishly.

She loved him in return: repaying him a hundredfold for his affection by her innocent love and trust. To her he was all that was perfect, all that was noble and generous. The big talk, the

glowing and sentimental discourse by which he was wont to impose upon himself, imposed upon her. She believed in that fancy portrait which he painted of himself, and which he himself believed in as a most faithful and unflattered likeness. She believed in that highly-coloured picture, and thought that George Mowbray Vandeleur Vane was indeed what he represented himself, and thought himself to be; an injured old man, a sainted martyr to the forgetfulness of the world, and the ingratitude of his children.

Poor Eleanor was never weary of listening to her father's stories about the Prince Regent, and all the lesser planets of the darkened sky in which Mr. Vane's light had once shone. She used to walk in the park with the old man in the sunny summer evenings, proud to see him bow to great people, who returned his recognition with friendly courtesy. She liked to fancy him in the days that were gone, riding side by side with those mighty ones of the earth, whom he was now content to watch wistfully across the iron railings. She was pleased to stroll about the West End in the dusky gloaming of the soft May night, and to look up at the lights in that princely mansion in Berkeley Square which George Vane had once

occupied. He showed her the windows which had belonged to this and that apartment; the drawing-room; the first Mrs. Vane's boudoir; the little girls' nursery and morning room. She fancied all those fairy chambers radiant with light and splendour; and then remembering the shabby rooms at Chelsea, clung closer to her father's arm, in her tender sorrow for his fallen state.

But she had inherited much of George Vane's sanguine temperament, and almost as firm as her belief in the past, which had been a reality, was her confidence in the splendid future, which her father hoped in. Nothing could have been more shadowy than the foundations upon which Mr. Vane had built for himself an airy castle. In his youth and middle age his most intimate friend and companion had been a certain Maurice de Crespigny, the owner of a noble estate in Berkshire, and *not* a friend of the Prince Regent's. So, while George Vane's two estates had melted away, and his three fortunes had been expended, Mr. de Crespigny, who was an invalid and a bachelor, had contrived to keep his land and his money.

There was only the difference of two or three years between the ages of the two friends. I

believe that Maurice de Crespigny was the younger of the two. And it was during their early college life that the young men had entered into a romantic alliance, very chivalrous and honourable in its nature, but scarcely likely to stand the wear and tear of worldly experience.

They were to be friends through life and until death. They were to have no secrets from each other. If by any chance they should happen to fall in love with the same person—and I really think these sentimental collegians rather wished that such a contingency might arise—one of them, the most noble, the most heroic, was quietly to fall back and suffer in silence, while the weaker won the prize. If either died a bachelor, he was to leave his fortune to the other, whatever less romantic and more common-place claimants, in the way of heirs presumptive, might press upon him.

These vows had been made at least five-and-forty years ago, but out of this folly of the past George Vane built his hope in the future. Maurice de Crespigny was now a soured and hypochondriacal old bachelor, shut in and defended on every side by greedy and sycophantic relations, and utterly unapproachable to his

shabby old bosom friend; who could as easily have made his way out of one of the lowest dungeons of the Bastille as he could force an entrance into that closely-guarded citadel within which his college companion sat, lonely and dismal, a desolate old man, watched over by sharp eyes, greedily noteful of every token of his decay, ministered to by hands that would have worked eagerly at his winding-sheet, if by so doing they could have hastened the hour of his death.

If George Vane—remembering his old friend, perhaps, with some latent feeling of tenderness intermingled with his mercenary hopes—made an effort to penetrate the cruel barriers about him, he was repulsed with ignominy by the two maiden nieces who kept watch and ward at Woodlands. If he wrote to Mr. de Crespigny, his missive was returned unopened, with a satirical intimation that the dear invalid's health was not in a state to endure the annoyance of begging letters. He had made a hundred attempts to cross the lines of the enemy, and had been mortified by a hundred failures; but his sanguine nature was not to be subdued by any humiliation, and he still believed, firmly and entirely, that whenever Maurice de Crespigny's will came to be opened,

his name, and his alone, would appear as sole heir to his old friend's wealth. He forgot that Maurice de Crespigny was his junior by some two or three years; for he had always heard of him of late as a feeble invalid tottering upon the verge of the grave; while he himself was erect and stalwart, broad-chested and soldierly-looking; so very soldierly in appearance that the sentinels on guard in the park were wont to salute him as he passed them, mistaking him for some military magnate.

Yes, he believed the day would come when poor De Crespigny—he always spoke of his friend with a certain pitiful tenderness—would drop quietly into his grave, and when *he* would reign at Woodlands with his darling Eleanor, avenging himself upon his ungrateful elder children, re-opening accounts with his old creditors—in all his visions of grandeur and patronage he never thought of paying his debts—and arising from the dull ashes of his poverty, a splendid phœnix, golden-plumed and exultant.

He taught his daughter this belief as religiously as he taught her the simple prayers which she said nightly at his knee. With all his faults he was no unbeliever, though the time which he

devoted to religious observances made a very small portion of his existence. He taught Eleanor to believe in the day that was to come, and the little girl saw the light of future splendour gleaming athwart the dreary swamp of difficulty through which she waded patiently by her father's side.

But the day came when George Vane and his child were to be separated, for a time at least. Eleanor's twelfth birthday was very near at hand, and she had as yet received no better education than the rather limited course of instruction which was to be obtained for a guinea and a half a quarter at the day school near Cheyne Walk. For nearly six years, inclusive of many intervals of non-attendance consequent upon non-payment, Miss Vane had frequented this humble seminary, in company with the daughters of the butchers and bakers and other plebeian inhabitants of the district. But by the time she was twelve years old the various sources from which her father's very desultory income had been drawn had one by one run dry and failed him. The weakest and most long-suffering of his creditors had crossed his name out of their ledgers; his friends had ceased to believe in the fiction of delayed remittances, urgent temporary need, and early repay-

ment; and he could no longer count upon an occasional five-pound note when the Chelsea landlady became clamorous, and the Chelsea general dealer refused to send home another ounce of tea, except on payment of ready money.

A desperate crisis had come, and in his despair the old man forgot his pride. For Eleanor's sake, if not for his own, he must endure humiliation. He must appeal to his eldest daughter, the hard-hearted but wealthy Hortensia Bannister, who had lost her stockbroker husband a twelvemonth before, and was now a rich and childless widow. Yes—he wiped the tears of humiliation away from his faded cheeks as he arrived at this resolution—he would try and forget the past, and would take Eleanor with him to Hyde Park Gardens, and appeal to her cruel sister in her behalf. His determination was speedily carried out, for he went to work with something of that desperate courage which a condemned criminal may feel when he goes to execution, and one sunny morning early in the June of 1850, he and his daughter sat in Mrs. Bannister's handsome drawing-room, fearfully awaiting the advent of that lady. She came to them after a very brief delay, for she was business-like and uncompromising in her habits, and she

had been prepared for this visit by a long, pitiful, explanatory letter from her father, in reply to which she had written very coldly and concisely, appointing an early interview.

She was a severe-looking woman of about five-and-thirty, with a hard face, and heavy black eyebrows, which met over her handsome aquiline nose when she frowned, which she did a great deal too often, poor Eleanor thought. Her features were like those of her father, but her grim and stony expression was entirely her own, and was perhaps the result of that early and bitter disappointment of finding herself a portionless girl, deserted by the man she loved, who fell away from her when he discovered the state of her father's fortunes, and compelled to marry for money, or to accept the wretched alternative of a life of poverty and drudgery.

This harsh disappointed woman affected no pretence of tender feeling for her half-sister. Perhaps the sight of Eleanor's childish beauty was scarcely pleasant to her. She herself had drawn a dreary blank in the great lottery of life, in spite of her wealth; and she may have envied this child her unknown future, which could not well be so dismal as the childless widow's empty existence.

But Mrs. Bannister was a religious woman, and tried to do her duty in a hard, uncompromising way, in which good works were not beautified by any such flimsy adornments as love and tenderness. So when she heard that her father lived from day to day a wretched hand-to-mouth existence, haunted by the grim phantom of starvation, she was seized with a sudden sense that she had been very wicked to this weak old man, and she agreed to allow him a decent pittance, which would enable him to live about as comfortably as a half-pay officer or a small annuitant. She made this concession sternly enough, and lectured her father so severely that he may be perhaps forgiven if he was not very grateful for his daughter's bounty, so far as he himself went; but he did make a feeble protestation of his thankfulness when Mrs. Bannister further declared her willingness to pay a certain premium, in consideration of which Eleanor Vane might be received in a respectable boarding-school as an apprentice or pupil teacher.

It was thus that the little girl became acquainted with the Misses Bennett of Wilmington House, Brixton; and it was in the household of these ladies that three years of her life had been passed.

Three quiet and monotonous years of boarding-school drudgery, which had only been broken by two brief visits to her father, who had taken up his abode in Paris; where he lived secure from the persecution of a few of his latter-day creditors —not the west-end tradesmen who had known him in his prime, *they* were resigned and patient enough under their losses—but a few small dealers who had trusted him in his decline, and who were not rendered lenient by the memory of former profits.

In Paris, Mr. Vane had very little chance of obtaining any information about his friend Maurice de Crespigny, but he still looked forward confidently to that visionary future in which he was to be master of the Woodlands estate. He had taken care to write a letter, soon after Eleanor's birth, which had been artfully conveyed to his friend, announcing the advent of this youngest child, and dwelling much on his love for her. He cherished some vague notion that, in the event of his death occurring before that of Maurice de Crespigny, the old man might leave his wealth to Eleanor. The contumely with which he had been treated by the maiden harpies who kept watch over his old friend had been pleasant to him rather

than otherwise, for in the anger of these elderly damsels he saw an evidence of their fear.

"If they knew that poor De Crespigny's money was left to them, they wouldn't be so savage," he thought. "It's evident they're by no means too confident about the future."

But there were other relatives of the old man's, less fortunate than the maiden sisters, who had found their way into the citadel, and planted themselves *en permanence* at Woodlands. There was a married niece, who had once been a beauty. This lady had been so foolish as to marry against her rich uncle's wishes, and was now a widow, living in the neighbourhood of Woodlands upon an income of two hundred a year. This lady's only son, Launcelot Darrell, had in his boyhood been a favourite with the old man, and was known to cherish expectations about Maurice de Crespigny's fortune. But the maiden sisters were patient and indefatigable women. No sacred fire was ever watched more carefully by classic vestal than was the ireful flame which burned in Maurice de Crespigny's heart when he remembered his married niece's ingratitude and disobedience. The unwearying old maids kept his indignation alive by every feminine subtlety, by every diplo-

matic devi&c. Heaven knows what they wanted with their uncle's money, for they were prim damsels, who wore stuff shoes and scanty dresses made in the fashion of their youth. They had outlived the very faculty of enjoyment, and their watns were almost as simple as those of the robins that perched upon their window sills; but for all this they were as eager to become possessors of the old man's wealth as the most heartless and spendthrift heir, tormented by Israelitish creditors, and subsisting entirely upon post obits.

CHAPTER IV.

UPON THE THRESHOLD OF A GREAT SORROW.

It was nearly noon when Eleanor Vane awoke upon the morning after her journey; for this young lady was a good sleeper, and was taking her revenge for four-and-twenty hours of wakefulness. I doubt, indeed, if she would have opened her eyes when she did, had not her father tapped at the door of her tiny chamber and told her the hour.

She woke smiling, like a beautiful infant who has always seen loving eyes watching above its cradle.

"Papa, darling," she cried, "is it you? I've just been dreaming that I was at Brixton. How delightful to wake and hear your voice. I won't be long, papa dear. But you haven't waited breakfast all this time, have you?"

"No, my dear. I have a cup of coffee and a roll brought me every morning at nine from a

traiteur's over the way. I've ordered some breakfast for you, but I wouldn't wake you till twelve. Dress quickly, Nell. It's a lovely morning, and I'll take you for a walk."

It was indeed a lovely morning. Eleanor Vane flung back the tawdry damask curtains, and let the full glory of the August noontide sun into her little room. Her window had been open all the night through, and the entresol was so close to the street that she could hear the conversation of the people upon the pavement below. The foreign jargon sounded pleasant to her in its novelty. It was altogether different to the French language as she had been accustomed to hear it at Brixton; where a young lady forfeited a halfpenny every time she forgot herself so far as to give utterance to her thoughts or desires in the commonplace medium of her mother tongue. The merry voices, the barking of dogs, the rattling of wheels and ringing of bells in the distance mingled in a cheerful clamour.

As Eleanor Vane let in that glorious noontide sunlight, it seemed to her that she had let in the morning of a new life; a new and happier existence, brighter and pleasanter than the dull boarding school monotony she had had so much of.

Her pure young soul rejoiced in the sunshine, the strange city, the change, the shadowy hopes that beckoned to her in the future, the atmosphere of love which her father's presence always made in the shabbiest home. She had not been unhappy at Brixton, because it was her nature to be happy under difficulties, because she was a bright, spontaneous creature to whom it was almost impossible to be sorrowful; but she had looked forward yearningly to this day, in which she was to join her father in Paris, never perhaps to go far away from him again. And it had come at last, this long-hoped-for day, the sunny opening of a new existence. It had come; and even the heavens had sympathy with her gladness, and wore their fairest aspect in honour of this natal day of her new life.

She did not linger long over her toilet, though she lost a good deal of time in unpacking her box—which had not been very neatly packed, by the way—and had considerable trouble in finding hair-brushes and combs, cuffs, collars, and ribbons, and all the rest of the small paraphernalia with which she wished to decorate herself.

But when she emerged at last, radiant and smiling, with her long golden hair falling in loose

curls over her shoulders, and her pale muslin dress adorned with fluttering blue ribbons, her father was fain to cry out aloud at the sight of his darling's beauty. She kissed him a dozen times, but took very little notice of his admiration —she seemed, in fact, scarcely conscious that he did admire her—and then ran into the adjoining room to caress a dog, an eccentric French poodle, which had been George Vane's faithful companion during the three years he had spent in Paris.

"Oh, papa!" Eleanor cried joyously, returning to the sitting-room with the dingy white animal in her arms, "I am so pleased to find Fido. You didn't speak of him in your letters, and I was afraid you had lost him, perhaps, or that he was dead. But here he is, just as great a darling, and just as dirty as ever."

The poodle, who was divided in half, upon that unpleasant principle common to his species, and who was white and curly in front, and smooth and pinky behind, reciprocated Miss Vane's caresses very liberally. He leaped about her knees when she set him down upon the slippery floor, and yelped wild outcries of delight. He was not permitted to pass the night in Mr. Vane's apartments, but slept in a dismal outhouse behind

the butcher's shop, and it was thus that Eleanor had not seen him upon her arrival in the Rue de l'Archevêque.

The young lady was so anxious to go out with her father, so eager to be away on the broad boulevards with the happy idle people of that wonderful city in which nobody ever seems to be either busy or sorrowful, that she made very short work of her roll and coffee, and then ran back to her little bed-chamber to array herself for a promenade. She came out five minutes afterwards, dressed in a black silk mantle and a white transparent bonnet, which looked fleecy and cloud-like against her bright auburn hair. That glorious hair was suffered to fall from under the bonnet and stream about her shoulders like golden rain, for she had never yet attained the maturer dignity of wearing her luxuriant tresses plaited and twisted in a hard knot at the back of her head.

"Now, papa, please, where are we to go?"

"Wherever you like, my darling," the old man answered; "I mean to give you a treat to-day. You shall spend the morning how you like, and we'll dine on the Boulevard Poissonnier. I've received a letter from Mrs. Bannister. It came

before you were up. I am to call in the Rue de la Paix for a hundred and six pounds. A hundred to be paid to Madame Marly, and six for me; my monthly allowance, my dear, at the rate of thirty shillings a week."

Mr. Vane sighed as he named the sum. It would have been better for this broken-down old spendthrift if he could have received his pittance weekly, or even daily; for it was his habit to dine at the Trois Frères, and wear pale straw-coloured gloves, and a flower in his button-hole, at the beginning of the month, and to subsist on rolls and coffee towards its close.

He unfolded the narrow slip of paper upon which his eldest daughter had written the banker's address and the amount which Mr. Vane was to demand, and looked at the magical document fondly, almost proudly. Any one unfamiliar with his frivolous and sanguine nature, might have wondered at the change which had taken place in his manner since the previous night, when he had tearfully bewailed his daughter's cruelty.

He had been an old man then, degraded, humiliated, broken down by sorrow and shame: to-day he was young, handsome, gay, defiant,

pompous, prepared to go out into the world and hold his place amongst the butterflies once more. He rejoiced in the delicious sensation of having money to spend. Every fresh five-pound note was a new lease of youth and happiness to George Vane.

The father and daughter went out together, and the butcher neglected his business in order to stare after Miss Vane, and the butcher's youngest child, a tiny damsel in a cambric mob-cap, cried out, "Oh, la belle demoiselle!" as Eleanor turned the corner of the narrow street into the sunny thoroughfare beyond. Fido came frisking after his master's daughter, and Mr. Vane had some difficulty in driving the animal back. Eleanor would have liked the dog to go with them in their noontide ramble through the Parisian streets, but her father pointed out the utter absurdity of such a proceeding.

Mr. Vane conducted his daughter through a maze of streets behind the Madeleine. There was no Boulevard Malesherbes in those days, to throw this part of the city open to the sweep of a park of artillery. Eleanor's eyes lit up with gladness as they emerged from the narrower streets behind the church into the wide boulevard, not as hand-

some then as it is to-day, but very broad and airy, gay and lightsome withal.

An involuntary cry of delight broke from Eleanor's lips.

"Oh, papa," she said, "it is so different from Brixton. But where are we going first, papa, dear?"

"Over the way, my dear, to Blount & Co.'s, in the Rue de la Paix. We'll get this money at once, Nelly, and we'll carry it straight to Madame Marly. They had no occasion to insult us, my dear. We have not sunk so low, yet. No, no, not quite so low as to rob our own children."

"Papa, darling, don't think of that cruel letter. I don't like to take the money when I remember that. Don't think of it, papa."

Mr. Vane shook his head.

"I *will* think of it, my dear," he answered, in a tone of sorrowful indignation—the indignation of an honourable man, who rebels against a cruel stigma of dishonour. "I will think of it, Eleanor. I have been called a thief—a thief, Eleanor. I am not very likely to forget *that*, I think."

They were in the Rue de la Paix by this time. George Vane was very familiar with the banker's office, for he had been in the habit of receiving

his monthly pension through an order on Messrs. Blount & Co. He left Eleanor at the foot of the stairs, while he ascended to the office on the first floor; and he returned five minutes afterwards, carrying a bundle of notes in one hand, and a delicious little roll of napoleons in the other. The notes fluttered pleasantly in the summer air, as he showed them to his daughter.

"We will go at once to Madame Marly, my darling," he said, gaily, "and give her these, without a moment's unnecessary delay. They shall have no justification in calling me a thief, Eleanor. You will write to your sister by this afternoon's post, perhaps, my dear, and tell her that I did not try to rob you. I think you owe so much as that to your poor old father."

George Vane's daughter clung lovingly to his arm, looking up tenderly and entreatingly in his face.

"Papa, darling, how can you say such things," she cried. "I will write and tell Mrs. Bannister that she has been very cruel, and that her insulting letter has made me hate to take her paltry money. But, papa, dearest, how can you talk of robbing *me*. If this money is really mine, take it, take every penny of it; if—if—you owe it to any-

body who worries you; or if you want it for anything in the world. I can go back to Brixton and earn my living to-morrow, papa. Miss Bennett and Miss Sophia told me so before I came away. You don't know how useful they began to find me with the little ones. Take the money, papa, dear, if you want it."

Mr. Vane turned upon his daughter with almost tragic indignation.

"Eleanor," he said, "do you know me so little that you dare to insult me by such a proposition as this? No; if I were starving I would not take this money. Am I so lost and degraded that even the child I love turns upon me in my old age?"

The hand which held the bank notes trembled with passionate emotion as the old man spoke.

"Papa, darling," Eleanor pleaded, "indeed, indeed, I did not mean to wound you."

"Let me hear no more of this, then, Eleanor, let me hear no more of it," answered Mr. Vane, drawing himself up with a dignity that would have become a classic toga, rather than the old man's fashionable over-coat. "I am not angry with you, my darling, I was only hurt, I was only hurt. My children have never known me,

Eleanor, they have never known me. Come, my dear."

Mr. Vane put aside his tragic air, and plunged into the Rue St. Honoré, where he called for a packet of gloves that had been cleaned for him. He put the gloves in his pocket, and then strolled back into the Rue Castiglione, looking at the vehicles in the roadway as he went. He was waiting to select the most elegantly appointed of the hackney equipages crawling slowly past.

"It's a pity the government insist on putting a painted badge upon them," he said, thoughtfully. "When I last called on Madame Marly, Charles the Tenth was at the Tuileries, and I had my travelling chariot and pair at Meurice's, besides a Britska for Mrs. Vane."

He had pitched upon a very new and shining vehicle, with a smart coachman, by this time, and he made that half hissing, half whistling noise peculiar to Parisians when they call a hackney carriage.

Eleanor sprang lightly into the vehicle, and spread her flowing muslin skirts upon the cushions as she seated herself. The passers by looked admiringly at the smiling young Anglaise with her white bonnet and nimbus of glittering hair.

"Au Bois, cocher," Mr. Vane cried, as he took his place by his daughter.

He had bought a tiny bouquet for his button-hole near the Madeleine, and he selected a pair of white doeskin gloves, and drew them carefully on his well-shaped hands. He was as much a dandy to-day as he had been in those early days when the Prince and Brummel were his exalted models.

The drive across the Place de la Concorde, and along the Champs Elysées, was an exquisite pleasure to Eleanor Vane; but it was even yet more exquisite when the light carriage rolled away along one of the avenues in the Bois de Boulogne, where the shadows of the green leaves trembled on the grass, and all nature rejoiced beneath the cloudless August sky. The day was a shade too hot, perhaps, and had been certainly growing hotter since noon, but Eleanor was too happy to remember that.

"How nice it is to be with you, papa, darling," she said, "and how I wish I wasn't going to this school. I should be so happy in that dear little lodging over the butcher's, and I could go out as morning governess to some French children, couldn't I? I shouldn't cost you much, I know, papa."

Mr. Vane shook his head.

"No, no, my love. Your education must be completed. Why should you be less accomplished than your sisters? You shall occupy as brilliant a position as ever they occupied, my love, or a better one, perhaps. You have seen me under a cloud, Eleanor; but you shall see the sunshine yet. You'll scarcely know your old father, my poor girl, when you see him in the position he has been used to occupy; yes, used to occupy, my dear. This lady we are going to see, Madame Marly, *she* remembers, my love. She could tell you what sort of a man George Vane was five-and-twenty years ago."

The house in which the fashionable schoolmistress who had "finished" the elder daughters of George Vane still received her pupils, was a white-walled villa, half-hidden in one of the avenues of the Bois de Boulogne.

The little hired carriage drew up before a door in the garden wall, and a portress came out to reply to the coachman's summons.

Unhappily, the portress said, Madame was not at home. Madame's assistants were at home, and would be happy to receive Monsieur and Mademoiselle. That might be per-

haps altogether the same thing, the portress suggested.

No, Monsieur replied, he must see Madame herself. Ah, but then nothing could be so unfortunate. Madame, who so seldom quitted the Pension, had to-day driven into Paris to arrange her affairs, and would not return until sunset.

Mr. Vane left his card with a few words written upon it in pencil, to the effect that he would call at two o'clock the next day, in the charge of the portress; and the carriage drove back towards Paris.

"Bear witness, Eleanor," said the old man, "bear witness that I tried to pay this money away immediately after receiving it. You will be good enough to mention that fact in your letter to my eldest daughter."

He had carried the notes in his hand all this time, as if eager to deliver them over to the schoolmistress, but he now put them into his breast-pocket. I think upon the whole he was rather pleased at the idea of retaining custody of the money for the next twenty-four hours. It was not his own, but the mere possession of it gave him a pleasant sense of importance; and again he might very probably have an opportunity

of displaying the bank notes, incidentally, to some of his associates. Unhappily for this lonely old man, his few Parisian acquaintances were of a rather shabby and not too reputable calibre, and were therefore likely to be somewhat impressed by the sight of a hundred and twenty-five napoleons, in crisp, new notes upon the Bank of France.

It was past three when Mr. Vane and his daughter alighted in front of the Palais Royal, and the coachman claimed payment for two hours and a-half. The old man had changed the first of his six napoleons at the glove-cleaner's, and he had a handful of loose silver in his waistcoat pocket, so the driver was quickly paid and dismissed, and Eleanor entered the Palais Royal, that paradise of cheap jewellery and dinners, hanging on her father's arm.

Mr. Vane bore patiently with his daughter's enthusiastic admiration of the diamonds and the paste, the glittering realities and almost as glittering shams in the jewellers' windows. Eleanor wanted to look at everything, the trinkets, and opera-glasses, and portmanteaus, and china,—everything was new and beautiful. The fountain was playing; noisy children were running about

amongst equally noisy nurses and idle loungers. A band was playing close to the fountain. The chinking of tea-spoons and cups and saucers, sounded in the Café de la Rotonde: people had not begun to dine yet, but the windows and glazed nooks in the doorways of the restaurants were splendid with their displays of gigantic melons, and dewy purple grapes, cucumbers, pears, tomatoes, and peaches. George Vane allowed his daughter to linger a long time before all the shops. He was rather ashamed of her exuberant delight, and unrestrained enthusiasm; for so much pleasure in these simple things was scarcely consistent with that *haut ton* which the old man still affected even in his downfall. But he had not the heart to interfere with his daughter's happiness—was it not strange happiness to *him* to have this beautiful creature with him, clinging to his arm, and looking up at him with a face that was glorified by her innocent joy.

They left the Palais Royal at last, before half its delights were exhausted, as Eleanor thought, and went through the Rue Richelieu to the Place de la Bourse, where Mr. Vane's eager companion looked wistfully at the doors of the theatre opposite the great Temple of Commerce.

"Oh, papa," she said, "how I should like to go to a theatre to-night."

Miss Vane had seen a good deal of the English drama during her Chelsea life, for the old man knew some of the London managers, men who remembered him in his prosperity, and were glad to give him admission to their boxes now and then, out of pure benevolence. But the Parisian theatres seemed mysteriously delightful to Eleanor, inasmuch as they were strange.

"Can you get tickets for the theatres here, papa," she asked, "as you used in London?"

Mr. Vane shrugged his shoulders.

"No, my love," he said, "it's not quite such an easy matter. I know a man who writes farces now and then for the Funambules—a very clever fellow—but he doesn't get many orders to give away, and that's not exactly the theatre I should like to take you to. I'll tell you what, though, Eleanor, I'll take you to the Porte St. Martin to-night—why should I deny my child an innocent pleasure?—I'll take you to the Porte St. Martin, unless—"

George Vane paused, and a gloomy shadow crept over his face—a shade that made him look an old man. His youthfulness of appearance

entirely depended upon the buoyancy of a nature which contended with age. The moment his spirits sank he looked what he was—an old man.

"Unless what, papa, dearest?" Eleanor asked.

"I—I had an appointment for to-night, my love, with—with a couple of gentlemen who—But I won't keep it, Eleanor,—no, no, I'll not keep it. I'll take you to the theatre. I can afford you that pleasure."

"Dear, dear papa, you never refuse me any pleasure; but it would be so selfish of me to ask you to break your appointment with these two gentlemen. You had better keep it."

"No, no, my dear—I'd—it would be better—perhaps. Yes, I'll take you to the Porte St. Martin."

Mr. Vane spoke hesitatingly. The shadow had not yet left his face. Had his daughter been less occupied by the delights of the Parisian shops, the novelty and gaiety of the crowd, she must surely have observed the change in that idolised father.

But she observed nothing, she could remember nothing but her happiness. This glorious day of reunion and delight seemed indeed the beginning of a new life. She looked back wonderingly at

the dull routine of her boarding-school existence. Could it be possible that it was only a day or two since she was in the Brixton school-room hearing the little ones, the obstinate, incorrigible little ones, their hateful lessons,—their odious monotonous repetitions of dry facts about William the Conqueror and Buenos Ayres, the manufacture of tallow candles, and the nine parts of speech?

They strolled on the boulevard till six o'clock, and then ascended the shining staircase of a restaurant on the Boulevard Poissonnier, where Eleanor saw herself reflected in so many mirrors that she was almost bewildered by the repetition of her own auburn hair and white bonnet.

The long saloons were filled with eager diners, who looked up from their knives and forks as the English girl went by.

"We dine à la carte here," her father whispered: "this is a fête day, and I mean to give you a first-class dinner."

Mr. Vane found a vacant table in an open window. The house was at a corner of the boulevard, and this window looked down the crowded thoroughfare towards the Madeleine. Eleanor exclaimed once more as the prospect burst upon her, and she saw all the boulevard

with its gay splendour, spread out, as it were, at her feet; but her father was too busy with the waiter and the *carte* to observe her manifestation of delight.

Mr. Vane was an epicure, and prided himself upon his talent for ordering a dinner. There was a good deal of *finesse* displayed by him now-a-days in the arrangement of a repast; for poverty had taught him all kinds of little diplomatic contrivances whereby he might, as it were, mingle economy and extravagance. He ordered such and such dishes "for one," intending to divide them with his child. A few Ostend oysters, some soup, —*purée crécy*—a little dish of beef and olives, a *sole normande,* a quarter of a roast chicken, and a *Charlotte Plombières.*

It was a long time since Eleanor had eaten one of her father's epicurean feasts, and she did ample justice to the dinner, even in spite of the ever recurrent distractions upon the boulevard below.

The dishes followed each other slowly, for the unresting waiters had many claimants on their attention, and the sun was low in the cloudless western sky when Mr. Vane and his daughter left the restaurant. It was nearly night; the lights

began to shine out through a hot white mist, for the heat had grown more and more oppressive as the day had declined. The Parisians sitting at little marble tables on the pavement outside the cafés fanned themselves with their newspapers, and drank effervescing drinks pertinaciously. It was a night upon which one should have had nothing more laborious to do than to sit outside Tortoni's and eat ices.

The noise and clamour, the oppressive heat, the bustle and confusion of the people rushing to the theatres, made Eleanor's head ache. One cannot go on being unutterably happy for ever, and perhaps the day's excitement had been almost too much for this young school-girl. She had walked long distances already upon the burning asphalte of the wonderful city, and she was beginning to be tired. Mr. Vane never thought of this; he had been accustomed to walk about day after day, and sometimes all day—for what should a lonely Englishman do in Paris but walk about?—and he forgot that the fatigue might be too much for his daughter. He walked on, therefore, with Eleanor still clinging to his arm; past the Ambigu, beyond the Barrière St. Antoine; and still the long lamp-lit boulevard stretched before them, away

into immeasurable distance, as it appeared to Miss Vane.

The hot white mist seemed to grow denser as the evening advanced; the red sun blazed and flashed on every available scrap of crystal; the gas-lamps newly illumined, strove against that setting sun. It was all light, and heat, and noise, and confusion, Eleanor thought, upon the boulevard. Very splendid, of course, but rather bewildering. She would have been glad to sit down to rest upon one of the benches on the edge of the pavement; but, as her father did not seem tired, she still walked on, patiently and uncomplainingly.

"We'll go into one of the theatres presently, Nelly," Mr. Vane said.

He had recovered his spirits under the invigorating influence of a bottle of Cliquot's champagne, and the gloomy shadow had quite passed away from his face.

It was nearly nine o'clock, and quite dark, when they turned towards the Madeleine again, on the way back to the Porte St. Martin. They had not gone far when Mr. Vane stopped, suddenly confronted by two young men who were walking arm-in-arm.

"Hulloa!" one of them cried in French, "you have served us a handsome trick, my friend."

George Vane stammered out an apology. His daughter had returned from school, he said, and he wished to show her Paris.

"Yes, yes," the Frenchman answered; "but we were aware of Mademoiselle's intended return, and it was arranged in spite of that that we should meet this evening: was it not so, my friend?"

He asked this question of his companion, who nodded rather sulkily, and turned away with a half weary, half dissatisfied air.

Eleanor looked at the two young men, wondering what new friends her father had made in Paris. The Frenchman was short and stout, and had a fair, florid complexion. Eleanor was able to see this, for his face was turned to the lamplight, as he talked to her father. He was rather showily dressed, in fashionably cut clothes, that looked glossy and new, and he twirled a short silver-headed cane in his gloved hands.

The other man was tall and slender, shabbily and untidily dressed in garments of a rakish cut, that hung loosely about him. His hands were thrust deep in the pockets of his loose over-

coat, and his hat was slouched over his forehead.

Eleanor Vane only caught one passing glimpse of this man's face as he turned sulkily away; but she could see the glimmer of a pair of bright, restless black eyes under the shadow of his hat, and the fierce curve of a very thick black moustache, which completely concealed his mouth. He had turned, not towards the lighted shop windows, but to the roadway; and he was amusing himself by kicking a wisp of straw to and fro upon the sharp edge of the curbstone, with the toe of his shabby patent leather boot.

The Frenchman drew George Vane aside, and talked to him for a few minutes in an undertone, gesticulating after the manner of his nation, and evidently persuading the old man to do something or other which he shrank from doing. But Mr. Vane's resistance seemed of a very feeble nature, and the Frenchman conquered, for his last shrug was one of triumph. Eleanor, standing by herself, midway between the sulky young man upon the curbstone and her father and the Frenchman, perceived this. She looked up anxiously as Mr. Vane returned to her.

"My love," the old man said, hesitatingly,

nervously trifling with his glove as he spoke: "do you think you could find your way back to the Rue de l'Archevêque?"

"Find my way back? Why, papa?"

"I—I mean, could you find your way back a—alone."

"Alone!"

She echoed the word with a look of mingled disappointment and alarm.

"Alone, papa?"

But here the Frenchman interposed eagerly.

Nothing was more simple, he said: Mademoiselle had only to walk straight on to the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs; she would then, and then—

He ran off into a string of rapid directions, not one of which Eleanor heard. She was looking at her father, Heaven knows how earnestly, for she saw in his face, in his nervous hesitating manner, something that told her there was some sinister influence to be dreaded from this garrulous, eager Frenchman and his silent companion.

"Papa, dear," she said, in a low, almost imploring voice, "do you really wish me to go back alone?"

"Why—why, you see, my dear, I—I don't

exactly wish—but there are appointments which, as Monsieur remarks, not — not unreasonably, should not be broken, and—

"You will stay out late, papa, perhaps, with these gentlemen—"

"No, no, my love, no, no; for an hour or so; not longer."

Eleanor looked up sorrowfully in the face she loved so dearly. Vague memories of grief and trouble in the past, mingled with as vague a presentiment of trouble in the future, filled her mind: she clasped her hands imploringly upon her father's arm.

"Come home with me to-night, papa," she said. "It is my first night at home. Come back, and we'll play *écarté* as we used at Chelsea. You remember teaching me."

Mr. Vane started, as if the tender grasp upon his arm had stung into his flesh.

"I—I can't come home to-night, Eleanor. At least, not for an hour. There—there are social laws, my dear, which must be observed; and when —when a gentleman is asked to give another his revenge, he—he can't refuse. I'll put you into a carriage, my darling, if you think you can't find your way."

"Oh, no, papa, dear, it's not that. I can find my way."

The Frenchman here interposed for the second time with some complimentary speech, addressed to Eleanor, who very imperfectly understood its purport. He had slipped his arm through that of George Vane, taking possession of him in a manner by that friendly gesture. In all this time the other man had never stirred from his sulky attitude upon the edge of the pavement.

Mr. Vane took his daughter's hand.

"I am sorry I can't take you to the theatre, my love," he said, in the same hesitating manner. "I—I regret that you should be disappointed, but —good night, my dear, good night. I shall be home by eleven; but don't sit up for me; don't on any account sit up."

He pressed her hand, held it for a few moments, as if scarcely knowing what to do with it, and then suddenly dropped it, with something of a guilty manner.

The Frenchman, with his arm still linked in the old man's, wheeled sharply round, and walked away towards the Barrière Saint Antoine, leaving Eleanor standing alone amongst the passers-by, looking wistfully after her father.

The other man looked up as the Frenchman led Mr. Vane away, and slowly followed them, with his head bent and his hands in his pockets. Eleanor stood quite still watching her father's erect figure, the short Frenchman, and the tall, sulky stranger following the other two, until all three were out of sight. Then turning homewards with a half-repressed sigh, she looked sadly down the long lamp-lit vista. It was very beautiful, very gay, brilliant, and splendid; but all that splendour and gaiety made her feel only the more lonely, now that her father had left her. The first day, the natal day of her new life, seemed to end very drearily, after all.

CHAPTER V.

WAITING.

Miss Vane walked very slowly homeward through the hot, breathless summer night. She was too sorrowful, too much depressed by the sudden disappointment which had fallen like a dark shadow upon the close of the day that had begun so brightly, to be embarrassed by any uncomfortable sense of her loneliness in the crowded thoroughfare.

No one molested or assailed her—she walked serene in her youth and innocence; though the full radiance of the lamplight rarely fell upon her face without some passing glance of admiration resting there also. She never once thought that her father had done wrong in leaving her to walk alone through that crowded Parisian street. In the unselfishness of her loving nature she scarcely remembered her disappointment about the theatre: not even when she passed the brilliantly lighted

edifice, and looked, a little wistfully perhaps, at the crowd upon the threshold.

She was uneasy and unhappy about her father, because in all her Chelsea experiences she remembered evil to have resulted from his going out late at night; vague and mysterious trouble, the nature of which he had never revealed to her, but whose effects had haunted him and depressed him for many dreary days. He had been sometimes, indeed, very often, poorer after a late absence from his shabby Chelsea lodging; he had been now and then richer; but he had always been alike remorseful and miserable after those occasional nights of dissipation.

His daughter was sorrowful therefore at parting with him. She knew that, in spite of his declaration that he would be home at eleven, it would be between one and two in the morning when he returned; not tipsy—no, thank Heaven, he was no drunkard—but with a nervous, wretched, half-demented manner, which was perhaps more sad to see than any ordinary intoxication.

"I was in hopes papa would always stay at home with me now that I am grown up," the young lady thought very sadly. "When I was

little, of course it was different; I couldn't amuse him. Though we were very happy sometimes then; and I could play écarté, or cribbage, or whist with two dummies. If I can get on very well with my education at Madame Marly's, and then get a situation as morning governess for a large salary—morning governesses do get high salaries sometimes—how happy papa and I might be."

Her spirits revived under the influence of cheering thoughts such as these. I have said before that it was scarcely possible for her to be long unhappy. Her step grew lighter and faster as she walked homeward. The glory of the gas lights brightened with the brightening of her hopes. She began to linger now and then before some of the most attractive of the shops, with almost the same intense rapture and delight that she had felt in the morning.

She was standing before a book-stall, or rather an open shop, reading the titles of the paper-covered romances, with the full glare of the shadeless gas lights on her face, when she was startled by a loud, hearty English voice, which exclaimed without one murmur of warning or preparation:

"Don't tell me that this tall young woman with the golden curls, is Miss Eleanor Vandeleur Vane, of Regent Gardens, King's Road, Chelsea, London, Middlesex. Please don't tell me anything of the kind, for I can't possibly believe anybody but Jack-and-the-beanstalk could have grown at such a rate."

Eleanor Vane turned round to greet this noisy gentleman.

"Oh, Dick," she cried, putting both her hands into the broad palm held out before her, "is it really you? Who would have thought of seeing you in Paris?"

"Or you, Miss Vane? We heard you were at school at Brixton."

"Yes, Dick," the young lady answered; "but I have come home now. Papa lives here, you know, and I am going to a finishing school in the Bois de Boulogne, and then I am going to be a morning governess, and live with papa always."

"You are a great deal too pretty for a governess," said the young man, looking admiringly at the bright face lifted up to him; "your mistress would snub you. Miss Vane, you'd better—"

"What, Dick?"

"Try our shop."

"What, be a scene-painter, Dick?" cried Eleanor, laughing. "It would be funny for a woman to be a scene-painter."

"Of course, Miss Vane. But nobody talked of scene-painting. You don't suppose I'd ask you to stand on the top of a ladder to put in skies and backgrounds, do you? There are other occupations at the Royal Waterloo Phœnix besides scene-painting. But I don't want to talk to you about that: I know how savage your poor old dad used to be when we talked of the Phœnix. What do you think I am over here for?"

"What, Richard?"

"Why, they're doing a great drama in eight acts and thirty-two tableaux at the Porte St. Martin; Raoul l'Empoisonneur it's called, Ralph the Poisoner; and I'm over here to pick up the music, sketch the scenery and effects, and translate the play. Something like versatility there, I think, for five-and-thirty shillings a week."

"Dear Richard, you were always so clever."

"To be sure; it runs in the family."

"And the Signora, she is well, I hope?"

"Pretty well; the teaching goes on *tant bon que mauvais*, as our friends over here say. The Clementi is a little thinner in tone than when you heard it last, and a little further off concert pitch; but as most of my aunt's pupils sing flat, that's rather an advantage than otherwise. But where are you going, Miss Vane? because, wherever it is, I'd better see you there. If we stand before this book-stall any longer, the proprietor may think we're going to buy something, and as the Parisians don't seem a buying people, the delusion might be too much for his nerves. Where shall I take you, Miss Vane?"

"To the Rue de l'Archevêque, if you please, behind the Madeleine. Do you know it?"

"Better than I know myself, Miss V. The Signora lived in that direction when I was a boy. But how is it that you are all alone in the streets at this time of night?"

"Papa had an appointment with two gentlemen, and he—"

"And he left you to walk home alone. Then he still—"

"Still what, Richard?"

The young man had stopped hesitatingly, and looked furtively at Eleanor.

"He still stays out late at night sometimes: a bad habit, Miss Vane. I was in hopes he would have been cured of it by this time; especially as there are no dens in the Palais Royal now-a-days; to the honour and glory of Napoleon the Third be it spoken."

"No dens in the Palais Royal," cried Eleanor. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing, my dear Miss Nelly, except that Paris used to be a very wild and wicked place."

"But it isn't now?"

"Oh dear, no. Our modern Lutetia is a very paradise of innocent delights, whose citizens enjoy themselves virtuously under the sheltering dictatorialism of a paternal government. You don't understand me—well, never mind, you are still the bright-faced child you were in the King's Road, Chelsea, only taller and prettier—that's all."

Miss Vane had taken her companion's arm, and they were walking away towards the Madeleine by this time; the young lady clinging to her new friend almost as confidingly as she had done to her father.

I don't think the confidence was misplaced. This young man, with the loud voice and the

somewhat reckless manner, was only assistant scene-painter and second violin player at a transpontine theatre. He was bound by no tie of relationship to the beautiful girl hanging upon his arm. Indeed, his acquaintance with Mr. Vane and his daughter had been of that accidental and desultory kind out of which the friendships of poor people generally arise.

The young man had lodged with his aunt in the same house that for nearly six years had sheltered the proud old spendthrift and his motherless child, and syme of Eleanor's earliest memories were of Signora Picirillo and her nephew Richard Thornton. She had received her first lessons upon the pianoforte from the kind Signora, whose Neapolitan husband had died years and years before, leaving her nothing but an Italian name, which looked very imposing at the top of the circulars which the music-mistress was wont to distribute amongst her pupils.

Richard Thornton, at eight-and-twenty, seemed a very elderly person in the eyes of the school-girl of fifteen. She could remember him years, and years, and years ago, as it seemed to her, sitting in his shirt sleeves through the long

summer afternoons, under the shadow of the scarlet runners in the little garden at Chelsea, smoking dirty clay pipes and practising popular melodies upon his fiddle. Her father had thought him a nuisance, and had been lofty and reserved in his patronage of the young man; but to Eleanor, Dick had been the most delightful of playfellows, the wisest of counsellors, the most learned of instructors. Whatever Richard did, Miss Vane insisted upon also doing, humbly following the genius she admired, with little toddling steps, along the brilliant pathway his talents adorned.

I am afraid she had learned to play "God save the Queen," and "Rory O'More," upon Richard's violin before she had mastered Haydn's "Surprise," or "Ah, vous dirai-je, Maman?" upon the Signora's shabby old grand piano. She smeared her pinafores with poor Dick's water-colours, and insisted upon producing replicas of the young scene-painter's sketches, with all the houses lop-sided, and the trunks of all the trees gouty. If Dick kept rabbits or silkworms, there was no greater happiness for Miss Vane than to accompany him to Covent Garden Market in quest of cabbage or mulberry leaves. I do not

mean that she ever deserted her father for the society of her friend; but there were times when Mr. Vane absented himself from his little girl; long days, in which the old man strolled about the streets of the West-End, on the look-out for the men he had known in his prosperity, with the hope of borrowing a pound or two, or a handful of loose silver, for the love of Auld Lang Syne; and longer nights, in which he disappeared from the Chelsea lodging for many dreary hours.

Then it was that Eleanor Vane was thrown into the companionship of the Signora and her nephew. Then it was that she read Richard's books and periodicals, that she revelled in "Jack Sheppard," and gloated over "Wagner, the Wehr Wolf." Then it was that she played upon the young man's violin, and copied his pictures, and destroyed his water-colours, and gorged his rabbits and silkworms, and loved and tormented, and admired him, after the manner of some beautiful younger sister, who had dropped from the clouds to be his companion.

This is how these two stood towards each other. They had not met for three years until to-night;

and in the interim Miss Eleanor Vane had grown from a hoyden of twelve into a tall, slender damsel of fifteen.

"You are so altered, Miss Vane," Richard said, as they walked along the boulevard, "that I can't help wondering how it was I knew you."

"And you're not altered a bit, Dick," answered the young lady; "but don't call me Miss Vane—it sounds as if you were laughing at me. Call me Nell, as you used to do, at Chelsea. Do you know, Dick, I contrived to go to Chelsea once last summer. It was against papa's wish, you know, that I should let them find out where I came from at Brixton; because, you see, Chelsea, or at least the King's Road, sounds vulgar, papa thought. Indeed, I believe he said he lived in Cadogan Place, when the Miss Bennetts asked him the question. He explained it to me afterwards, you know, poor dear; and it wasn't exactly a story, for he had lodged there for a fortnight once, just after his marriage with mamma, and when he was beginning to get poor. So I was obliged to manage so cleverly to get to Regent's Gardens, Dick; and when I did get there you were gone, and the Signora's rooms were to let, and there was a nasty cross old

woman in our lodgings, and the scarlet runners in the garden were *so* neglected, and I saw your rabbit-hutches, all broken and forgotten in the corner by the dust-hole, but the rabbits were gone. The dear old place seemed so changed, Dick, though Mr. and Mrs. Migson were very kind, and very pleased to see me, but they couldn't tell me where you and the Signora were living."

"No, we moved two or three times after leaving Regent's Gardens. You see we're obliged to study the pupils, Nell, rather than our own convenience. Chelsea was a long way from the Waterloo Phœnix, in spite of the short cuts; but wherever the Signora's pupils are thickest, we're obliged to pitch our tents. They're thickest about Tottenham-court Road and Euston Square way now: so we're living in the Pilasters, Dudley Street."

"The Pilasters! That sounds quite grand, Dick."

"Yes, doesn't it? *Magnifique et pas cher.* We've a chimney-sweep next door but one, and no end of mangles. The Pilasters would be very nice, if we'd two sides of the way, but unfortunately we haven't; the other side's stables. It

isn't my prejudices make me object to that; but the grooms make such an abominable noise cleaning down their horses, and I wake every morning out of a dream in which it's Boxing-night, and my transformation scene is getting the goose."

The young man laughed cheerily, and guided his companion across the road to the other side of the boulevard. It was past ten o'clock when they reached the corner of the Rue de l'Archevêque, and the butcher's shop was closed.

Eleanor knew that she had only to push open the little side door, and that she would find the key of her father's rooms in the custody of the butcher's wife. She was very tired, almost ready to drop, poor girl, for she had walked a long way since alighting at the Palais Royal with her father; but she was almost sorry that she had reached her destination. The sense of her loneliness returned, now that she was to part with her old friend.

"Thank you very much for seeing me home, Dick," she said, shaking hands with the young scene-painter. "It was very selfish of me to bring you so far out of your way."

"Selfish of you! Why, you don't suppose

I'd let you prowl about the streets by yourself, Nell?"

Eleanor's face flushed as her friend said this: there was a reproach to her father implied in the speech.

"It was my own fault that I was so late," she said. "It was only just nine when papa left me; but I loitered a little, looking at the shops. I shall see you again, Dick, I hope. But of course I shall, for you'll come and see papa, won't you? How long do you stay in Paris?"

"About a week, I suppose. I've a week's leave of absence, and double salary, besides my expenses. They know the value of a clever man at the Phœnix, Miss Vane."

"And where are you staying, Dick?"

"At the Hôtel des Deux Mondes, near the markets. I've an apartment in convenient proximity to the sky, if I want to study atmospheric effects. And so you live here, Nell?"

"Yes, those are our windows."

Eleanor pointed to the open sashes of the entresol: the fluffy worsted curtains were drawn, but the windows were wide open.

"And you expect your papa home—"

"At eleven o'clock at the latest," she said.

Richard Thornton sighed. He remembered Mr. Vane's habits, and he remembered that the little girl in pinafores had been wont to keep abnormal hours in her long watches for her father's coming. He had often found her, on his return from the transpontine theatre at one or two o'clock, with the door of the little sitting-room ajar, waiting patiently for the old man's coming.

"You won't sit up for your papa, Nell," he said, as he shook hands with her.

"Oh, no, papa told me not to sit up."

"Good night, then. You look tired, Nell. I'll call to-morrow, and I'll take you to the theatre, if your papa will let you go, and you shall see 'Raoul l'Empoisonneur.' Such a scene, Nell, in the seventh act. The stage divided into eight compartments, with eight different actions going on simultaneously, and five murders before the fall of the curtain. It's a great piece, and ought to make Spavin and Cromshaw's fortune."

"And yours, Dick."

"Oh, yes. Cromshaw will shake me by the hand in that delightful, gentlemanly manner of his: and Spavin—why Spavin will give me a five-pound note for my adaptation of 'Raoul,' and tell

every member of the company, in confidence, that all the great scenes have been written in by him, and that the piece was utter rubbish till he reconstructed it."

"Poor Richard!"

"Yes, Nell, poorer than the gentleman who wrote the almanack, I dare say. But never mind, Nell. I don't think the game of life pays for much expenditure in the way of illumination. I think the wisest people are those who take existence easily. Spavin's wealth can't give him anything better than diamond studs and a phaeton. The virtuous peasant, Nell, who can slap his chest, and defy his enemies to pick a hole in his green-baize jerkin, gets the best of it in the long run, I dare say."

"But I wish you were rich, Dick, for the Signora's sake," Eleanor said, gently.

"So do I, Nelly. I wish I was lessee of the Phœnix, and I'd bring you out as Juliet, with new palace arches for the ball-room, and a lime-light in the balcony scene. But, good night, my dear; I mustn't keep you standing here, like this, though parting is such sweet sorrow, that I really shouldn't have the heart to go away to-night if I didn't mean to call to-morrow. That

line's rather longer than the original, Nell, isn't it?"

Eleanor Vane laughed heartily at her old friend's random talk, as she wished him good night. All the light-heartedness of her careless childhood seemed to return to her in Richard Thornton's society. Her childhood had not been an unhappy one, remember; for in all her father's troubles, he had contrived to keep his head above water, somehow or other, and the influence of his over-sanguine spirit had kept Eleanor bright and hopeful under every temporary cloud in the domestic sky.

But she felt very desolate and lonely as she pushed open the door and entered the dark passage at the side of the shop. The butcher's wife came out at the sound of her footstep, and gave her the key, with some kindly word of greeting which Eleanor scarcely understood.

She could only say, "Bon soir, madame," in her school-girl French, as she dragged herself slowly up the little winding stair, thoroughly worn out, physically and mentally, by this time.

The little entresol seemed terribly close and stifling. She drew back the curtains, and looked out through the open window; but even the

street itself seemed oppressively hot in the moonless, airless August night.

Eleanor found half a wax candle in a flat china candlestick, and a box of matches, set ready for her. She lighted this candle, and then flung off her bonnet and mantle, before she sat down near the window.

"I shall have a very short time to wait, if papa comes home at eleven o'clock," she thought.

Alas! she remembered in her old childish experiences, that he had *never* come home at the promised hour. How often, ah, how often, she had waited, counting the weary hours upon the church clocks,—there was one which chimed the quarters; and trembling sometimes at those strange sounds which break the night silence of every house. How often she had "hoped against hope," that he might, for this once, return at the time he had promised.

She took the candle in her hand and looked about for a book. She wanted to while away the dreary interval which she knew must elapse before her father's return. She found a novel of Paul Féval's in a dirty and tattered cover, on the little marble-topped writing-table. The leaves were crumpled, and smeared with stains and

splotches of grease, for it was Mr. Vane's habit to amuse himself with a work of fiction while he took his matutinal roll and coffee. He had taken to novel reading in his frivolous old age, and was as fond of a sentimental story as any school-girl, —as his daughter herself.

Miss Vane drew the lumbering little table to the open window, and sat down before it, with her candle close to her elbow, and the tattered book spread out before her. No breath of air flickered the flame of her candle, or ruffled the golden hair swept back from her brow.

The passers-by upon the opposite side of the street—they were few and far between by this time—looked up at the lighted window, and saw a pretty picture by the dim glimmer of that solitary candle. The picture of a girl, serene in her youth and innocence, bending over her book: her pale muslin dress and auburn hair faintly visible in the subdued light.

The rattle of wheels and the cries of coachmen sounded far off upon the Boulevard, and in the Rue de Rivoli, and only made the silence more palpable in the Rue de l'Archevêque. Now and then a carriage came into that quiet corner, and Eleanor Vane looked up from her book, breath-

less, eager, expectant, fondly hoping that her father might have come back to her in some hired vehicle: but the solitary carriage always rolled away, until the sound of its wheels mixed with the rattle of the distant wheels upon the Boulevards.

There were clocks in the distance that struck the quarters. How long those quarters seemed! Paul Féval was very interesting, no doubt. There was an awful mystery in those greasy tattered pages: a ghastly mystery about two drowned young women, treacherously made away with, as it seemed, upon the shore of a dreary river overshadowed by willows. There were villains and rascals paramount throughout this delightful romance; and there was mystery and murder enough for half a dozen novels. But Eleanor's thoughts wandered away from the page. The dreary river-bank, and the ghostly pollard-willows, the drowned young women, and the ubiquitous villains, all mingled themselves with her anxious thoughts about her father; and the trouble in the book seemed to become a part of the trouble in her own mind, adding its dismal weight to her anxieties.

There were splotchy engravings scattered here

and there through the pages of Monsieur Féval's romance, and Eleanor fancied by-and-by that the villain in these pictures was like the sulky stranger who had followed her father and the Frenchman away towards the Barrière Saint Antoine.

She fancied this, although she had scarcely seen that silent stranger's face. He had kept it, as it seemed, purposely averted, and she had only caught one glimpse of the restless black eyes under the shadow of his hat, and the thick moustache that shrouded his mouth. There is always something mysterious and unpleasant in the idea of anything that has been hidden from us, however trivial and insignificant that thing may be. Eleanor Vane, growing more and more nervous as the slow hours crept away, began to worry herself with the vivid recollection of that one brief glimpse in which she had seen the silent stranger's face.

"He cannot have a good countenance," she thought, "or the recollection of it would not make me so uncomfortable. How rude he was, too! I did not much like the Frenchman, but at least he was polite. The other man was very disagreeable. I hope he is not a friend of papa's." And then she returned to the drowned young

women, and the water-side, and the willows; trying in vain to bury herself in the romance, and not to listen so eagerly for the striking of the quarters. Sometimes she thought, "Before I turn over to the next page, papa will be home," or, "Before I can finish this chapter I shall hear his step upon the stairs."

Breathless though the night was, there were many sounds that disturbed and mocked this anxious watcher. Sometimes the door below shook—as if by some mysterious agency, there being no wind—and Eleanor fancied that her father's hand was on the latch. Sometimes the stairs creaked, and she started from her chair, eager to run and receive him, and firmly believing that he was stealing stealthily up to his apartments, anxious not to disturb the sleeping inmates of the house. She had known his cautious footfall sound exactly thus in her old midnight watches.

But all these sounds were only miserable delusions. Quarter after quarter, each quarter longer than the last, hour after hour, struck from the clocks distant and near. The rattling of the wheels upon the Boulevards had died gradually away, and at last had ceased altogether.

It was long past four, and Eleanor had pushed aside her book. It was daylight,—grey, cold, morning, chill and dismal after the oppressive August night, and she stood now in the window watching the empty street.

But still the quarters chimed from the distant clocks: those distant chimes had become terribly distinct now in the early morning stillness. But the silence was not of long duration. The rumble of waggon wheels sounded far away in the Rue St. Honoré. The rush and clatter of a detachment of cavalry clashed upon the asphalte of the Place de la Concorde. The early sound of a horn called out some wretched recruits to perform their morning exercise in the court-yards of the Louvre. The cheerful voices of workpeople echoed in the streets; dogs were barking, birds singing, the yellow sun mounting in a cloudless heaven.

But there were no signs of the coming of George Vane with the morning sunlight; and as the day grew older and brighter, the anxious face of the pale watcher at the open window only grew paler and more anxious.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BLACK BUILDING BY THE RIVER.

RICHARD THORNTON was by no means an early riser. He was generally one of the last of those gentlemen who shuffled into the orchestra at the ten o'clock rehearsal of a new melodrama, in which all the effect of a murder or an abduction depended upon the pizzicato twittering of violins, and the introduction of explosive chords at particular crises in the action of the piece. Mr. Thornton was a sluggard, who complained most bitterly of the heartlessness of stage-managers and prompter's minions, who seemed to take a malicious delight in nailing cruel slips of paper to the door-post of the Phœnix; terrible mandates, wherein the Full Band was called at ten; "no ten minutes;" the meaning of this last mysterious clause being that the ten minutes' grace which is usually accorded to the tardy performer shall on this occasion be cut off and done away with.

But Richard was out for a holiday now. The eyes of Messrs. Spavin and Cromshaw would fain have followed him in his Parisian wanderings, to see that he did double work for his double wage; but the proprietors of the Royal Waterloo Phœnix not being blest with the gift of clairvoyance, Mr. Thornton defied and snapped his fingers at them, secure in the consciousness of his own value.

"If J. T. Jumballs, the author of all the original dramas they have done at the Phœnix for the last ten years, understood French, he'd do 'Raoul' for two pound ten," thought Richard, as he stood before his looking-glass in the blazing August sunshine, rubbing his chin contemplatively, and wondering whether the bristles would be too strong if he let them stop till another morning.

If the honest truth is to be recorded, it must be acknowledged that Mr. Thornton was by no means too scrupulous in the performance of his toilet. He had a habit of forgetting to shave until his chin was covered by an appearance of red stubble, dappled here and there by patches of blue and brown, for his beard was wont to crop up in unexpected hues, which surprised

even himself. He sympathised with the great lexicographer in not having any overstrained partiality for clean linen, and, indeed, usually wore a coloured shirt, the bosom of which was arabesqued with stray splashes of whitewash and distemper, to say nothing of occasional meandering evidences of the numerous pints of porter imbibed by the young artist during his day's labour. When Mr. Thornton bought a new suit of clothes he put them on, and wore them continuously; and ate and drank and painted in them until they were so worn and frayed, and enfeebled by ill treatment, that they began to drop away from him in rusty fragments like the withered leaves which fall from a sturdy young oak. There were people who declared that Mr. Thornton slept in his ordinary costume; but of course this was a cruel slander.

To walk eight or nine miles a-day to and fro between the place of your abode and the scene of your occupation; to paint the best part of the scenery for a large theatre in which new pieces are brought out pretty frequently; to play second fiddle, and attend early rehearsals upon cold mornings; to jot down the music cues in a melodrama, or accompany Mr. Grigsby in his

new comic song, or Madame Rosalbini in her latest cachuca; and to adapt a French drama, now and then, by way of adding a few extra pounds to your income, is not exactly to lead an idle life: so perhaps poor Richard Thornton may be forgiven if his friends had occasion to laugh at his indifference upon the subject of soap and water. They even went so far as to call him "Dirty Dick," in their more facetious moments; but I don't think the obnoxious soubriquet wounded Richard's feelings. Everybody liked him and respected him as a generous-hearted, genial-tempered, honourable-minded fellow, who would scarcely have told a lie to save his life, and who scorned to drink a pint of beer that he couldn't pay for, or to accept a favour which he didn't mean to return.

People at the Phœnix knew that Richard Thornton's father had been a gentleman, and that the young man had a certain pride of his own. He was the only man in the theatre who neither abused nor flattered his employers. The carpenters and gasmen touched their caps when they talked to him, though he was shabbier than any of those *employés;* the little ballet girls were fond of him, and came to tell him their troubles

when the cruel stage-manager had put their names down for shilling fines in a horrible book which was to be seen on the treasury table every Saturday morning. The old cleaners of the theatre told Mr. Thornton about their rheumatic knee-joints, and came to him for sympathy after dreary hours of scouring. He had patience with and compassion for every one. People knew that he was kind and tender-hearted; for his pencil initials always appeared in some obscure corner of every subscription list, against a sum which was bulky when taken in relation to the amount of his salary. People knew that he was brave, for he had once threatened to fling Mr. Spavin into the pit when that gentleman had made some insinuation impeaching Richard's honour as to the unfair use of gold-leaf in the Enchanted Caves of Azure Deep. They knew that he was dutiful, and kind, and true to the old music-mistress with whom he lived, and whom he helped to support. They knew that when other men made light of sacred things, and were witty and philosophical upon very solemn subjects, Richard Thornton would leave the assembly gravely and quietly, how eloquent or lively soever he might have been before. People knew

all this, and were respectful to the young scene-painter, in spite of the rainbow smears of paint upon his shabby coat, and the occasional fringe of mud upon the frayed edges of his trousers.

Upon this August morning Mr. Thornton made very short work of his toilet.

"I won't go out to breakfast," he thought, "though I can get two courses and a dessert in the Palais Royal, to say nothing of half a bottle of sour claret, for fifteen pence. I'll get some coffee and rolls, and go to work at some of the scenes for 'Raoul.'"

He rang a bell near his bed, pushed a table to the window which looked out into the quadrangle of the hotel, and sat down with a battered tin box of water-colours and a few squares of Bristol board before him. He had to ring several times before one of the waiters condescended to answer his summons, but he worked away cheerily, smoking as he worked, at a careful water-coloured copy of a rough pencil-sketch which he had made a couple of nights before in the pit of the theatre.

He didn't leave off to eat his breakfast when it came, by-and-by; but ate his rolls and drank his coffee in the pauses of his work,

only laying down his brush for a minute or so at a time. The scene was a street in old Paris, the houses very dark and brown, with over-hanging latticed windows, exterior staircases, practicable bridges, and all sorts of devices which called for the employment of a great deal of glue and pasteboard in Richard's model. This scene was only one out of eight, and the young scene-painter wanted to take perfect models of all the eight scenes back to the Phœnix. He had M. Michel Lévy's sixty centimes edition of the new play spread open before him, and referred to it now and again as he painted.

"Humph! Enter *Raoul* down staircase in flat. *Raoul's* a doctor, and the house with the staircase is his. The house at the corner belongs to *Gobemouche*, the comic barber, and the practicable lattice is *Madeline's*. She'll come to her window by-and-bye to talk to the doctor, whom she thinks a very excellent man; though he's been giving her mild doses of *aqua tofana* for the last three weeks. *Catherine de Medicis* comes over the practicable bridge, presently, disguised as a nun. I wonder how many melodramas poor *Catherine* has appeared in since she left this mortal

stage? Did she ever do anything except poison people, I wonder, while she was alive? She never does anything else at the Porte Saint Martin, or on the Surrey side of the Thames. I must sketch the costumes, by-and-by. *Raoul* in black velvet and scarlet hose, a pointed beard, straight eyebrows, short black hair,—austere and dignified. Cromshaw will do *Raoul*, of course; and Spavin will play the light-comedy soldier who gets drunk, and tears off *Catherine's* velvet mask in the last scene. Yes, that'll be a great scene on our side of the water. *Charles the Ninth*—he's a muff, so anybody can play him—has just finished reading the arsenicated edition of a treatise on hawking, closes the last page of the book, feels the first spasm. *Catherine,* disguised as a nun, has been followed by Spavin—by the comedy-soldier, I mean—to the Louvre, after a conversation having been overheard between her and *Raoul.* The *King,* in the agonies of spasmodic affection, asks who has murdered him. 'That woman—that sorceress—that fiend in human form!' cries the soldier, snatching the mask from *Catherine's* face.—'Merciful Heaven, it is my mother!' shrieks the *King,* falling dead with a final spasm. That 'it is my mother!' ought to be

good for three rounds of applause, at least. I dare say Spavin will have the speech transferred from the *King's* part to his own. 'Merciful Heaven, it is *his* mother!' would do just as well."

Poor Richard Thornton, not having risen very early, worked on till past five o'clock in the afternoon before his model was finished. He got up with a sigh of relief when the pasteboard presentment of the old Parisian street stood out upon the little table, square and perfect.

He filled his pipe and walked up and down before the table, smoking and admiring his work in an innocent rapture.

"Poor Nelly," he thought presently. "I promised I would call in the Rue de l'Archevêque to-day, to pay my respects to the old chap. Not that he'd particularly care to see me, I dare say, but Nell is such a darling. If she asked me to stand on my head, and do poor old Goffie's gnome-fly business, I think I should try and do it. However, it is too late to call upon Mr. Vandeleur Vane to-day, so I must put that off till to-morrow. I must drop in again at half-price at the Porte Saint Martin, to have another look at the scene in eight compartments. That'll

be rather a poser for the machinist at the Phœnix, I flatter myself. Yes, I must have one more look at it, and—Ah! by-the-bye, there's the Morgue!"

Mr. Thornton finished his pipe and rubbed his chin with a reflective air.

"Yes, I must have a look at the Morgue before I go," he thought; "I promised that old nuisance J. T. Jumballs that I'd refresh my memory about the Morgue. He's doing a great drama in which one half of the *dramatis personæ* recognise the other half dead on the marble slabs. He's never been across the Channel, and I think his notions of the Morgue are somewhat foggy. He fancies it's about as big as Westminster Abbey, I know, and he wants the governors to give him the whole depth of the stage for his great scene, and set it obliquely, like the Assyrian hall in 'Sardanapalus,' so as to give the idea of illimitable extent. I'm to paint the scene for him. '*The interior of the Morgue by lamplight. The meeting of the living and the dead.*' That'll be rather a strong line for the bill, at any rate. I'll go and have some dinner in the Palais Royal, and then go down and have a look at the gloomy place. An exterior wouldn't

be bad, with Notre Dame in the distance, but an *interior*—Bah! J. T. J. is a clever fellow, but I wish his genius didn't lie so much in the charnel-house."

He put on his hat, left his room, locked the door, and ran down the polished staircase, whistling merrily as he went. He was glad to be released from his work, pleased at the prospect of a few hours' idleness in the foreign city. Many people, inhabitants and visitors, thought Paris dull, dreary, and deserted in this hot August weather, but it was a delightful change from the Pilasters and the primæval solitudes of Northumberland Square, that quaint, grim quadrangle of big houses, whose prim middle-class inhabitants looked coldly over their smart wire window-blinds at poor Richard's shabby coat.

Mr. Thornton got an excellent dinner at a great bustling restaurateur's in the Palais Royal, where for two francs one might dine upon all the delicacies of the season, in a splendid saloon, enlivened by the martial braying of a brass band in the garden below.

The *carte du jour* almost bewildered Richard by its extent and grandeur, and he chose haphazard from the catalogue of soups which the

obliging waiter gabbled over for his instruction. He read all the pleasing by-laws touching the non-division of dinners, and the admissibility of exchanges in the way of a dish for a dessert, or a dessert for a dish, by payment of a few extra centimes. He saw that almost all the diners hid themselves behind great wedges of orange-coloured melon at an early stage of the banquet, and generally wound up with a small white washing-basin of lobster salad, the preparation of which was a matter of slow and solemn care and thought. He ordered his dinner in humble imitation of these accomplished *habitués*, and got very good value for his two francs. Then he paid his money, bowed to the graceful lady who sat in splendid attire in a very bower of salads and desserts, and went down a broad staircase that led into a street behind the Palais Royal, and thence to the Rue Richelieu.

He treated himself to a cup of coffee and a cigar at a café in the Place de la Bourse, and then strolled slowly away towards the Seine, smoking, and dawdling to look at this and that as he walked along. It was nearly eight o'clock therefore when he emerged, from some narrow street, upon the quay, and made his way towards that bridge be-

neath whose shadow the Morgue hides, like some foul and unhallowed thing. He did not much like the task which Mr. Jumballs had imposed upon him, but he was too good-natured to refuse compliance with the transpontine dramatist's desire, and far too conscientious to break a promise one made, however disagreeable the performance of that promise might prove.

He walked on resolutely, therefore, towards the black, shed-like building.

"I hope there are no bodies there to-night," he thought. "One glance round the place will show me all I want to see. I hope there are no poor dead creatures there to-night."

He stopped before going in, and looked at a couple of women who were standing near, chattering together with no little gesticulation.

He asked one of these women the question, Were there any bodies in the Morgue?

Yes,—the women both answered with one voice. There had not long been brought the body of a gentleman, an officer it was thought, poisoned in a gaming-house. A murder, perhaps, or a suicide; no one knew which.

Richard Thornton shrugged his shoulders as he turned away from the idle gossips.

"Some people would call me a coward if they knew how I dislike going into this place," he thought.

He threw away his cigar, took off his hat, and slowly crossed the dark threshold of the Parisian dead-house.

When he came out again, which was not until after the lapse of at least a quarter of an hour, his face was almost as white as the face of the corpse he had left within. He went upon the bridge, scarcely knowing where he went, and walking like a man who walks in his sleep.

Not more than half a dozen yards from the Morgue he came suddenly upon the lonely figure of a girl, whose arm rested on the parapet of the bridge, and whose pale face was turned towards the towers of Notre Dame.

She looked up as he approached, and called him by his name.

"*You* here, Eleanor?" he cried. "Come away, child; come away, for pity's sake!"

CHAPTER VII.

SUSPENSE.

ELEANOR VANE and the scene-painter stood upon the bridge looking at each other for a few moments after Richard's cry of mingled terror and astonishment.

Had not Eleanor's mind been entirely absorbed by one cruel anxiety, she would have wondered at her old friend's strange greeting. As it was she took no heed of his manner. The shadows of the summer night were gathering over the city and upon the quiet river; the towers of Notre Dame loomed dimly through the twilight.

"Oh, Richard!" Eleanor cried, "I have been so unhappy. Papa didn't come home all last night, nor yet to-day. I waited for him hour after hour until late in the afternoon; and then the house seemed unbearable; I *couldn't* stay in any longer, and I came out to look for him. I have been far up on the Boulevard where I parted

with him last night, and all the way along the crowded streets about there: and then through other streets, till I found myself down here by the water, and I'm so tired. Oh, Dick, Dick, how unkind of papa not to come home. How unkind of my darling father to give me this misery."

She clasped her hands convulsively upon her companion's arm, and bending her head, burst into tears. Those tears were the first which she had shed in all her trouble; the first relief after long hours of agonising suspense, of weary watching.

"Oh, how can papa treat me so?" she cried, amid her sobbing. "How can he treat me so?"

Then, suddenly raising her head, she looked at Richard Thornton, her clear grey eyes dilated with a wild terror, which gave her face a strange and awful beauty.

"Richard!" she cried; "Richard! you don't think that there—that there is—anything wrong —that anything has happened to my father?"

She did not wait for him to answer, but cried out directly, as if shrinking in terror from the awful suggestion in her own words:—

"What should happen to him? he is so well and strong, poor darling. If he is old, he is not

like an old man, you know. The people of the house in the Rue de l'Archevêque have been very kind to me; they say I am quite foolish to be frightened, and they told me that papa stopped out all night once last summer. He went to Versailles to see some friends, and stayed away all night without giving any notice that he was going to do so. I know it's very silly of me to be so frightened, Richard. But I always was frightened at Chelsea if he stayed out. I used to fancy all sorts of things. I thought of all kinds of dreadful things last night, Dick, and to-day; until my fancies almost drove me mad."

During all this time the scene-painter had not spoken. He seemed unable to offer any word of comfort to the poor girl who clung to him in her distress, looking to him for consolation and hope.

She looked wonderingly into his face, puzzled by his silence, which seemed unfeeling; and it was not like Richard to be unfeeling.

"Richard!" she cried, almost impatiently. "Richard, speak to me! You see how much misery I've suffered, and you don't say a word! You'll help me to find papa, won't you?"

The young man looked down at her. Heaven

knows she would have seen no lack of tenderness or compassion in his face, if it had not been hidden by the gathering gloom of the August evening. He drew her hand through his arm, and led her away towards the other side of the water, leaving the black roof of the dead-house behind him.

"There is nothing I would not do to help you, Eleanor," he said, gently. "God knows my heart, my dear; and He knows how faithfully I will try to help you."

"And you will look for papa, Richard, if he should not come home to-night—he may be at home now, you know, and he may be angry with me for coming out alone, instead of waiting quietly till he returned; but if he should not come to-night, you'll look for him, won't you, Richard? You'll search all Paris till you find him?"

"I'll do everything that I could do for you if I were your brother, Eleanor," the young man answered gravely; "there are times in our lives when nobody but God can help us, my dear, and when we must turn to Him. It's in the day of trouble that we want His help, Nelly."

"Yes, yes, I know. I prayed, last night; again,

and again, and again, that papa might come back soon. I have been saying the same prayer all to-day, Richard; even just now, when you found me standing by the parapet of the bridge, I was praying for my dear father. I saw the church towers looking so grand and solemn in the twilight, and the sight of them made me remember how powerful God is, and that He can always grant our prayers."

"If it seems best and wisest in his sight, Nell."

"Yes, of course; sometimes we pray for foolish things, but there could be nothing foolish in wishing my darling father to come back to me. Where are you taking me, Dick?"

Eleanor stopped suddenly, and looked at her companion. She had need to ask the question, for Richard Thornton was leading her into a labyrinth of streets in the direction of the Luxembourg, and seemed to have very little notion whither he was going.

"This is not the way home, Richard," Eleanor said; "I don't know where we are, but we seem to be going further and further away from home. Will you take me back to the Rue de l'Archevêque, Dick? We must cross the river again, you know, to get there. I want to go home at

once. Papa may have come home, and he'll be angry, perhaps, if he finds me absent. Take me home, Dick."

"I will, my dear. We'll cross the water further on, by the Louvre; and now tell me, Eleanor—I—I can't very well make inquiries about your father, unless I fully understand the circumstances under which you parted from him last night. How was it, my dear? What happened when Mr. Vane left you upon the Boulevard?"

They were walking in a broad, quiet street in which there were very few passers-by. The houses stood back behind ponderous gates, and were hidden by sheltering walls. The stately mansions between court and garden had rather a decayed aspect, which gave a certain dreariness to their grandeur. The fashionable world seemed to have deserted this quiet quarter for the leafy avenues leading away from the Champs Elysées.

Richard and Eleanor walked slowly along the broad footway. The stillness of the soft summer night had some effect upon the school-girl's fever of impatience. The grave, compassionate tones of her friend's voice soothed her. The burst of passionate weeping which had almost convulsed her slight frame half an hour before, had been an

unspeakable relief to her. She clung to her companion's arm confidingly, and walked patiently by his side; without questioning him as to where he was leading her, though she had a vague idea that he was not taking her homewards.

"I will not be foolish about papa," she said; "I will do as you tell me, Richard; I will trust in God. I am sure my dear father will return to me. We are so fond of each other; you know, Richard, we are all the world to each other; and my poor darling looks so hopefully forward to the day in which he will have Mr. de Crespigny's fortune. I don't hope for that quite so much as papa does, Dick; for Mr. de Crespigny may live to be a very, very old man, and it seems so wicked to wish for any one's death. The day I look forward to is the day when I shall have finished my education, and be able to work for papa. That must be almost better than being rich, I should think, Dick. I can't imagine any happier fate than to work for those we love."

Her face brightened as she talked, and she turned to her companion, looking to him for sympathy; but Richard's head was averted, and he seemed to be staring absently at the houses upon the opposite side of the way.

He was silent for some moments after Eleanor had left off speaking; and then he said, rather abruptly:

"Tell me, my dear, how did you part with your father last night?"

"Why, we had been dining on the Boulevard; and after dinner, papa took me for a long walk, ever so far, past all the theatres, and he had promised to take me to the Ambigu or the Porte Saint Martin; but as we were coming back we met two gentlemen, friends of papa's, who stopped him and said they had an appointment with him, and persuaded him to go back with them."

"Back with them! Back where?"

"I mean back towards a big stone gateway we had passed a little time before. I only know they turned that way, but I don't know where they went. I stood and watched them till they were out of sight."

"And the two men, what were they like?"

"One of them was a little Frenchman, stout and rosy-faced, with a light moustache and beard like the Emperor's. He was smartly dressed, and had a cane, which he kept twirling when he talked to papa."

"Did you hear what he said?"

"No, he spoke in a low voice, and he talked French."

"But you speak French, Eleanor?"

"Yes, but not as they speak it here. The people seem to talk so fast here, it's quite difficult to understand them."

"But the other man, Nell; what was he like?"

"Oh, he was a disagreeable-looking man, and seemed to have a sulky manner, as if he was offended with papa for breaking his appointment, and didn't care how the matter ended. I scarcely saw his face, at least only for a moment, just long enough to see that he had black eyes, and a thick black moustache. He was tall, and shabbily dressed, and I fancied he was an Englishman, though he never once spoke."

"He never spoke! It was the Frenchman, then, who persuaded your father to go away with him?"

"Yes."

"And he seemed very anxious?"

"Oh, yes, very anxious."

Richard Thornton muttered something between his set teeth, something which sounded like a curse.

"Tell me one thing, Eleanor," he said. "Your

poor father never was too well off, I know. He could not be likely to have much money about him last night. Do you know if he had any?"

"Yes, he had a great deal of money."

"What do you mean by a great deal? A few pounds, I suppose?"

"Oh, much more than that," Eleanor answered. "He had a hundred pounds—a hundred pounds in new bank notes, French notes. It was the money my half-sister, Mrs. Bannister, had sent him, to pay for my education at Madame Marly's."

"Mrs. Bannister," said Richard, catching at the name. "Ah, to be sure, I remember now. Mrs. Bannister is your sister. She is very well off, is she not, and has been kind to you? If you were in any trouble, you would go to her, I suppose, Eleanor?"

"Go to her if I were in trouble! Oh, no, no, Dick, not for the world!"

"But why not? She has been kind to you, hasn't she, Nell?"

"Oh, yes, very kind in paying money for my education, and all that; but you know, Richard, there are some people who seem to do kind things in an unkind manner. If you knew the cruel letter that Mrs. Bannister wrote to papa—the

cruel, humiliating things she said only a few days ago, you couldn't wonder that I don't like her."

"But she is your sister, Nell; your nearest relation."

"Except papa."

"And she ought to love you, and be kind to you. She lives at Bayswater, I think I've heard you say?"

"Yes, in Hyde Park Gardens."

"To be sure. Mrs. Bannister, Hyde Park Gardens, Bayswater."

He repeated the name and address, as if he wished to impress them upon his memory.

"I will take you home now, Nell," he said. "My poor child, you must be tired to death."

"How can I think about being tired, Richard," exclaimed Eleanor, "when I am so anxious about papa? Oh, if I only find him at home, what happiness it will be!"

But she hung heavily upon her friend's arm, and Richard knew that she was very tired. She had been wandering about Paris for several hours, poor child, hither and thither, in the long, unfamiliar streets, following all sorts of unlikely people who looked in the distance something like

her father; hoping again and again, only again and again to be disappointed.

They turned into a wider thoroughfare presently, and the scene-painter called the first hackney vehicle which passed him, and lifted Eleanor into it. She was almost fainting with fatigue and exhaustion.

"What have you had to eat to-day, Nell?" he asked.

She hesitated a little, as if she had forgotten what she had eaten, or indeed whether she had eaten at all.

"There was some coffee and a couple of rolls sent for papa this morning. He has his breakfast sent him from a *traiteur's*, you know. I had one of the rolls."

"And you've had nothing since?"

"No. How could I eat when I was so wretched about papa?"

Richard shook his head reproachfully.

"My darling Nell!" he said, "you promised me just now that you'd be a good girl, and trust in Providence. I shall take you somewhere and give you some supper, and then you must promise me to go home and get a good night's rest."

"I will do whatever you tell me, Richard," Eleanor answered, submissively; "but let me go home first, please, and see if papa has come back."

The scene-painter did not for a few moments reply to this request, but he answered presently in an abstracted tone.

"You shall do what you like, Nell."

He told the coachman to drive to the Rue de l'Archevêque, but he would not let Eleanor alight from the vehicle when they reached the corner of the street and the little butcher's shop, eager as she was to spring out and run into the house.

"Stay where you are, Nell," he said, authoritatively. "I will make all inquiries."

Eleanor obeyed him. She was exhausted by a weary night of watching, a long day of agitation and anxiety, and she was too weak to oppose her old friend. She looked hopelessly up at the open windows on the entresol. They were exactly as she had left them four or five hours ago. No glimmer of light gave friendly token that the rooms were occupied.

Richard Thornton talked to the butcher's wife for a long time, as it seemed to Eleanor; but he had very little to tell her when he came back to

the carriage. Mr. Vane had not returned: that was all he said.

He took his companion to a café near the Madeleine, where he insisted upon her taking a large cup of coffee and a roll. It was all he could persuade her to take, and she begged to be allowed to sit at one of the tables outside the café.

She might see her father go by, she said, on his way to the Rue de l'Archevêque.

The two friends sat at a little iron table rather apart from the groups of animated loungers sitting at other tables drinking coffee and lemonade. But George Mowbray Vandeleur Vane did not pass that way throughout the half hour during which Eleanor lingered over her cup of coffee.

It was past ten o'clock when Richard Thornton bade her good night at the threshold of the little door beside the butcher's shop.

"You must promise me not to sit up to-night, Nelly," he said, as he shook hands with her.

"Yes, Richard."

"And mind you keep your promise this time. I will come and see you early to-morrow. God bless you, my dear, and good night."

He pressed her hand tenderly. When she had closed the door behind her, he crossed the narrow

street, and waited upon the other side of the way until he saw a light in one of the entresol windows. He watched while Eleanor came to this window and drew a dark curtain across it, and then he walked slowly away.

"God bless her, poor child," he murmured, in a low, compassionate voice, "poor lonely child!"

The grave thoughtfulness of his expression never changed as he walked homewards to the Hôtel des Deux Mondes. Late as it was when he reached his chamber on the fifth story, he seated himself at the table, and pushing aside his clay pipe and tobacco-pouch, his water-colours and brushes, his broken palettes and scraps of Bristol board, and all the litter of his day's work, he took a few sheets of foreign letter paper and a bottle of ink from a shabby leather desk, and began to write.

He wrote two letters, both rather long, and folded, sealed, and directed them.

One was addressed to Mrs. Bannister, Hyde Park Gardens, Bayswater; the other to Signora Picirillo, the Pilasters, Dudley Street, Northumberland Square.

Richard Thornton put both these letters in his pocket and went out to post them.

"I think I have acted for the best," he muttered, as he went back to the hotel near the market-place; "I can do nothing more until to-morrow."

CHAPTER VIII.

GOOD SAMARITANS.

GEORGE VANE did not come home. Eleanor kept the promise made to her faithful friend, and tried to sleep. She flung herself, dressed as she was, upon the little bed near the curtained alcove. She would thus be ready to run to her father, whenever he came in, she thought, to welcome and minister to him. She was thoroughly worn out, and she slept; a wretched slumber, broken by nightmares and horrible dreams, in which she saw her father assailed by all kinds of dangers, a prey to every manner of misfortune and vicissitude. Once she saw him standing on a horrible rock, menaced by a swiftly advancing tide, while she was in a boat only a few paces from him, as it seemed, doing battle with the black waves, and striving with all her might to reach and rescue him, but never able to do so.

In another dream he was wandering upon the

crumbling verge of a precipice—he seemed a white-haired, feeble, tottering old man in this vision—and again she was near him, but unable to give him warning of his danger, though a word would have done so. The agony of her endeavour to utter the one cry which would have called that idolised father from his death, awoke her.

But she had other dreams, dreams of quite a different character, in which her father was restored to her, rich and prosperous, and he and she were laughing merrily at all the foolish tortures she had inflicted upon herself; and other dreams again, which seemed so real that she fancied she must be awake; dreams in which she heard the welcome footsteps upon the stair, the opening of the door, and her father's voice in the next room calling to her.

These dreams were the worst of all. It was terrible to awake after many such delusions and find she had been again deluded. It was cruel to awake to the full sense of her loneliness, while the sound of the voice she had heard in her dream still lingered in her ears.

The dark hours of the short summer night seemed interminable to her in this wretched, bewildered, half-sleeping, half-waking state; even

longer than they had appeared when she sat up watching for her father's return. Every fresh dream was a slow agony of terror and perplexity.

At last the grey daylight stole in through the half-closed shutters, the vague outlines of the furniture grew out of the darkness; duskily impalpable and ghastly at first, then sharp and distinct in the cold morning light. She could not rest any longer; she got up and went to the window; she pushed the sash open, and sank down on her knees with her forehead resting on the window sill.

"I will wait for him here," she thought. "I shall hear his step in the street. Poor dear, poor dear, I can guess why he stays away. He has spent that odious money, and does not like to return and tell me so. My darling father, do you know me so little as to think that I would grudge you the last farthing I had in the world, if you wanted it?"

Her thoughts rambled on in strange confusion until they grew bewildering; her brain became dizzy with perpetual repetitions of the same idea; when she lifted her head—her poor, weary, burning, heavy head, which seemed a leaden weight that it was almost impossible to raise—and

looked from the window, the street below reeled beneath her eyes, the floor upon which she knelt seemed sinking with her into some deep gulf of blackness and horror. A thousand conflicting sounds—not the morning noises of the waking city—hissed and buzzed, and roared and thundered in her ears, growing louder and louder and louder, until they all melted away in the fast-gathering darkness.

The sun was shining brightly into the room when the compassionate mistress of the house found Mr. Vane's daughter half-kneeling, half lying on the ground, with her head upon the cold sill of the open window, and her auburn hair streaming in draggled curls about her shoulders. Her thin muslin frock was wet with the early dew. She had fainted away, and had lain thus, helpless and insensible, for several hours.

The butcher's wife undressed her and put her to bed. Richard Thornton came to the Rue de l'Archevêque half an hour afterwards, and went away again directly to look for an English doctor. He found one, an elderly man with grave and gentle manners, who declared that Miss Vane was suffering from fever brought on by intense

mental excitement: she was of a highly nervous temperament, he said, and that she required little to be done for her; she only wanted repose and quiet. Her constitution was superb, and would triumph over a far more serious attack than this.

Richard Thornton took the doctor into the adjoining room, the little sitting-room which bore the traces of Mr. Vane's occupation, and talked to him in a low voice for some minutes. The medical man shook his head gravely.

"It is very sad," he said; "it will be better to tell her the truth, if possible, as soon as she recovers from the delirium. The anxiety and suspense have overtaxed her brain. Anything would be better than that this overstrained state of the mind should continue. Her constitution will rally after a shock; but with her highly nervous and imaginative nature, everything is to be dreaded from prolonged mental irritation. She is related to you, I suppose?"

"No, poor child! I wish she were."

"But she is not without near relatives, I hope?"

"No, she has sisters—or at least half-sisters—and brothers."

"They should be written to, then, immediately," the doctor said, as he took up his hat.

"I have written to one of her sisters, and I have written to another lady, a friend, who will be of more use, I fancy, in this crisis."

The doctor went away, promising to send some saline draughts to keep the fever under, and to call again in the evening.

Richard Thornton went into the little bed-chamber where the butcher's wife sat beside the curtained alcove, making up some accounts in a leather-covered book. She was a hearty pleasant-mannered young woman, and had taken up her post by the invalid's bed very willingly, although her presence was always much needed in the shop below.

"*Chut,*" she whispered, with her finger on her lip, "she sleeps, *pauvrette !*"

Richard sat down quietly by the open window. He took out Michel Lévy's edition of "Raoul," a stump of lead pencil, and the back of an old letter, and set to work resolutely at his adaptation. He could not afford to lose time, even though his adopted sister lay ill under the shadow of the worsted curtains that shrouded the alcove on the other side of the little room.

He sat long and patiently, turning the Poison drama into English with wonderful ease and

rapidity; and meekly bearing a deprivation that was no small one to him, in the loss of his clay pipe, which he was in the habit of smoking at all hours of the day.

Eleanor awoke at last, and began talking in a rambling, incoherent way about her father, and the money sent by Mrs. Bannister, and the parting upon the Boulevard.

The butcher's wife drew back the curtain, and Richard Thornton went to the bedside and looked down tenderly at his childish friend.

Her golden-tinted hair was scattered on the pillow, tangled and roughened by the constant movement of her restless head. Her grey eyes were feverishly bright, and burning spots blazed upon the cheeks which had been so deadly pale on the previous night. She knew Richard, and spoke to him; but the delirium was not over, for she mixed the events of the present with the Chelsea experiences of long ago, and talked to her old friend of the Signora, the violin, and the rabbits. She fell off into a heavy sleep again, after taking the effervescent medicine sent her by the English surgeon, and slept until nearly twilight. In these long slumbers her fresh and powerful constitution asserted itself, and took

compensation for the strain that had been made upon it in the past day or two.

Richard went away in the afternoon, and did not return till late at night, when the butcher's wife told him that her charge had been very restless, and had asked repeatedly for her father.

"What are we to do?" the good woman said, shrugging her shoulders with a despairing gesture. "Are we to tell her?"

"Not yet," Richard answered. "Keep her quiet; keep her as quiet as you can. And if it is positively necessary to tell her anything, say that her father has been taken ill, away from home, and cannot be brought back yet. Poor child! it seems so cruel to keep her in suspense, and still more cruel to deceive her."

The butcher's wife promised to do all in her power to keep her patient quiet. The doctor had sent an opiate. Miss Vane could not sleep too much, he said.

So another night passed, this time very peacefully for Eleanor, who lay in a heavy slumber broken by no cruel dreams. She was very, very weak the next day, for she had scarcely eaten anything since the roll and coffee which Richard had made her take; and though she was not

exactly delirious, her mind seemed almost incapable of receiving any very vivid impression. She listened quietly when they told her that her father could not come home because he was ill.

Richard Thornton came to the Rue de l'Archevêque several times during this second day of Eleanor's illness, but he only stayed a few minutes upon each occasion. He had a great deal to do, he told the butcher's wife, who still kept faithfully to her post in the sick room, only stealing away now and then, while Eleanor was asleep, to attend to her business.

It was past eleven o'clock that night when the scene-painter came for the last time. Eleanor had grown worse as the evening advanced, and was by this time terribly feverish and restless. She wanted to get up and dress herself, and go to her father. If he was ill, how could they keep her from him, how could they be so cruel as to keep her from his side?

Then, starting up suddenly from her pillow, she would cry out wildly that they were deceiving her, and that her father was dead.

But help and comfort were near at hand. When Richard came, he did not come alone.

He brought a lady with him; an elderly, grey-headed woman, dressed in shabby black.

When this lady appeared upon the threshold of the dimly-lighted little bedchamber, Eleanor Vane suddenly sprang up in her bed, and threw out her arms with a wild cry of surprise and delight.

"The Signora!" she exclaimed, "the dear, kind Signora!"

The lady took off her bonnet, and then went close up to the bed, and seating herself on the edge of the mattress, drew Eleanor's fair head upon her bosom, smoothing the tangled hair with unspeakable tenderness.

"My poor child!" she murmured again and again. "My poor, poor child!"

"But, dear Signora," Eleanor cried, wonderingly, "how is it that you are here? Why didn't Richard tell me that you were in Paris?"

"Because I have only just arrived, my darling."

"Only just arrived! Only just arrived in Paris! But why did you come?"

"I came to see you, Eleanor," the Signora answered, very gently. "I heard that you were in trouble, my dear, and I have come to you; to help and comfort you if I can."

The butcher's wife had withdrawn into the little sitting-room where Richard sat in the darkness. Eleanor Vane and the Signora were therefore quite alone.

Hitherto the invalid's head had rested very quietly upon her friend's bosom, but now she lifted it suddenly and looked full in the Signora's face.

"You came to me because I was in trouble," she said. "How should I be in trouble so long as my father lives? What sorrow can come to me while he is safe? He is ill, they say, but he will get better; he will get better, won't he? He will be better soon, dear Signora; he will be better soon?"

She waited for an answer to her breathless questioning, looking intently in the pale quiet face of her friend; then suddenly, with a low, wailing cry, she flung up her hands and clasped them wildly above her head.

"You have all deceived me," she cried, "you have all deceived me: my father is dead!"

The Signora drew her arm caressingly round Eleanor Vane, and tried to shelter the poor burning head once more upon her shoulder; but Eleanor shrank from her with an impatient gesture, and, with her hands still clasped above

her head, stared blankly at the dead wall before her.

"My dear, my dear," the Signora said, trying to unclasp the rigid hands which were so convulsively clasped together. "Eleanor, my dear, listen to me; for pity's sake try and listen to me, my own dear love. You must know, you must have long known, my dear, that heavy sorrows come to us all, sooner or later. It is the common lot, my love, and we must all bow before the Divine hand that afflicts us. If there were no sorrow in this world, Eleanor, we should grow too much in love with our own happiness; we should be frightened at the approach of grey hairs and old age; we should tremble at the thought of death. If there were no better and higher life than this, Eleanor, sorrow and death would indeed be terrible. You know how very much affliction has fallen to my share, dear. You have heard me speak of the children I loved; all taken from me, Nelly, all taken away. If it were not for my dear nephew, Richard, I should stand quite alone in the world, a desolate old woman, with no hope on this side of the grave. But when my sons were taken from me, God raised me up another son in him. Do you think that

God ever abandons us, Eleanor, even when he afflicts us most heavily? I have lived a long life, my dear, and I tell you NO!"

The Signora waited in vain for some change in the rigid attitude, the stony face. Eleanor Vane still stared blankly at the dead wall before her.

"You have all deceived me," she repeated; "my father is dead!"

It was useless talking to her; the tenderest words were dull and meaningless jargon to her ears. That night the fever grew worse, and the delirium was at its height. The butcher's wife was relieved by a very patient and accustomed watcher, for the Signora had sat by many sick-beds, hoping against hope, until despair crept into her heart, as the grey shadows of approaching death came over a beloved face, never again to pass away.

The fever lasted for several days and nights, but throughout every change the English doctor declared that Eleanor Vane's constitution would carry her through a worse attack than this.

"I am glad you told her," he said one morning to the Signora, "there will be less to tell her by-and-by, when she begins to get strong again."

There was, therefore, something more to be told.

Little by little the fever passed away; the crimson spots faded out of the invalid's hollow cheeks; the unnatural lustre of the grey eyes grew less and less vivid; little by little the mind grew clearer, the delirious wanderings less frequent.

But with the return of perfect consciousness there came terrible bursts of grief—grief that was loud and passionate in proportion to the impulsive vehemence of Eleanor Vane's character. This was her first sorrow, and she could not bear it quietly. Floods of tears drowned her pillow night after night; she refused to be comforted; she repulsed the patient Signora; she would not listen to poor Richard, who came sometimes to sit by her side, and tried his best to beguile her from her grief. She rebelled against their attempted consolation.

"What was my father to you?" she cried, passionately. "You can afford to forget him. He was all the world to me!"

But it was not in Eleanor's nature to be long ungrateful for the tenderness and compassion of

those who were so patient with her in this dark hour of her young life.

"How good you are to me," she cried sometimes, "and what a wretch I am to think so little of your goodness. But you don't know how I loved my father. You don't know—you don't know. I was to have worked for him; I was to have worked for him by-and-by, and we were to have led such a happy life together."

She was growing strong again in spite of her grief. Her elastic temperament asserted itself in spite of her sorrow, which she never ceased to think of night and day, and she arose after her illness like a beautiful flower which had been beaten and crushed by the storm.

Richard Thornton's leave of absence had expired for some days, but the Royal Phœnix Theatre closed its doors in the hot summer months, and he was therefore comparatively free. He stayed in Paris with his aunt, for they were both bent upon one purpose, to be accomplished at any sacrifice to themselves. Thank Heaven! there are always good Samaritans in the world, who do not mind turning backward upon their life's journey when there is a desolate and wounded traveller in need of their help and tenderness.

The Parisian atmosphere was cooling down in the early days of September—faint but refreshing breezes were beginning to blow away the white mists of summer heat upon the boulevards, when Eleanor Vane was well enough to sit in the little saloon above the butcher's shop, and drink tea in the English fashion with her two friends.

She was well enough to do this, and Richard and the Signora were beginning to think of turning homewards; but before they could well leave Paris there was something that ought to be told to Eleanor—something that she *must* know sooner or later—something that it would be perhaps better for her to know at once.

But they had waited from time to time, thinking that she might ask some question which would lead to the revelation that must ultimately be made to her.

Upon this September afternoon she sat near the open window, looking very beautiful and virginal in a loose white muslin dressing-gown, and with her long auburn curls falling upon her shoulders. She had been silent for a long time: her two companions watching her furtively, observant of every change in her countenance. Her cup of tea stood untasted on a little table at her side, and

she was sitting with her hands loosely locked together in her lap.

She spoke at last, and asked that very question which must inevitably lead to the revelation her friends had to make to her.

"You have never told me how papa died," she said; "his death must have been sudden, I know."

Eleanor Vane spoke very quietly. She had never before mentioned her dead father with so little outward evidence of emotion. The hands loosely locked together upon her lap stirred with a slightly tremulous motion; the face, turned towards the Signora and Richard Thornton, had a look of fixed intensity; and that was all.

"Papa died suddenly, did he not?" she repeated.

"Yes, my dear, very suddenly."

"I thought so. But why was he not brought home? Why couldn't I see—"

She stopped abruptly, and turned her face away towards the open window. She was trembling violently now from head to foot.

Her two companions were silent. That terrible something which was as yet unrevealed must be told sooner or later; but who was to tell it to

this girl, with her excitable nature, her highly wrought nervous temperament?

The Signora shrugged her shoulders despondingly, as she looked at her nephew. Mr. Thornton had been painting all the afternoon in the little sitting-room. He had tried to interest Eleanor Vane in the great set scenes he was preparing for *Raoul*. He had explained to her the nature of a vampire trap in the wainscot of the poisoner's chamber, and had made his pasteboard model limp in his repeated exhibition of its machinery. The vampire trap was a subtle contrivance which might have beguiled any one from their grief, Dick thought; but the wan smile with which Eleanor watched his work only made the scene-painter's heart ache. Richard sighed as he returned his aunt's look. It seemed quite a hopeless case as yet. This poor lonely child of fifteen might go melancholy mad, perhaps, in her grief for a spendthrift father.

Eleanor Vane turned upon them suddenly while they sat silent and embarrassed, wondering what they should say to her next.

"My father committed suicide!" she said, in a strangely quiet voice.

The Signora started and rose suddenly, as if

she would have gone to Eleanor. Richard grew very pale, but sat looking down at the litter upon the table, with one hand trifling nervously amongst the scraps of cardboard and wet paint-brushes.

"Yes," cried Eleanor Vane, "you have deceived me from first to last. You told me first that he was not dead; but when you could no longer keep my misery a secret from me, you only told me half the truth—you only told me half the cruel truth. And even now, when I have suffered so much that it seems as if no further suffering could touch me, you still deceive me, you still try to keep the truth from me. My father parted from me in health and spirits. Don't trifle with me, Signora; I am not a child any longer, I am not a foolish school-girl, whom you can deceive as you like. I am a woman, and will know the worst. My father killed himself!"

She had risen in her excitement, but clung with one hand to the back of her chair, as if too weak to stand without that support.

The Signora went to her, and wound her arms about the slight trembling figure; but Eleanor seemed almost unconscious of that motherly caress.

"Tell me the truth," she cried vehemently, "did my father kill himself?"

"It is feared that he did, Eleanor."

The pale face grew a shade whiter, and the trembling frame became suddenly rigid.

"It is feared that he did!" Eleanor Vane repeated. "It is not certain, then?"

The Signora was silent.

"Why don't you tell me the truth?" cried the girl, passionately. "Do you think you can make my misery less to me by dropping out your words one by one? Tell me the worst. What can there be worse than my father's death; his unhappy death; killed by his own hand, his poor desperate hand? Tell me the truth. If you don't wish me to go mad, tell me the truth at once."

"I will, Eleanor, I will," the Signora answered gently. "I wish to tell you all. I wish that you should know the truth, sad as it may be to hear. This is the great sorrow of your life, my dear, and it has fallen upon you very early. I hope you will try and bear it like a Christian."

Eleanor Vane shook her head with an impatient gesture.

"Don't talk to me of my sorrow," she cried,

"what does it matter what I suffer? My father, my poor father, what must he have suffered before he did this dreadful act? Don't talk about me; tell me of him, and tell me the worst."

"I will, my darling, I will; but sit down, sit down, and try to compose yourself."

"No, I'll stand here till you have told me the truth. I'll not stir from this spot till I know all."

She disengaged herself from the Signora's supporting arm, and with her hand still resting on the chair, stood resolute before the old music-mistress and her nephew. I think the Signora and the scene-painter were both afraid of her, she looked so grand in her beauty and despair.

She seemed indeed, as she had said, no longer a child or a school-girl; but a woman, desperate and almost terrible in the intensity of her despair.

"Let me tell Eleanor the truth of this sad story," Richard said, "it may be told very briefly. When your father parted with you, Nelly, on the night of the 11th of August, he and the two men who were with him went at once to an obscure café in one of the streets near the Barrière Saint Antoine. They were in the habit of going there, it seems, sometimes playing billiards in the large

open room on the ground floor, sometimes playing cards in a *cabinet particulier* on the entresol. Upon this night they went straight to the private room. It was about half-past nine when they went in. The waiter who attended upon them took them three bottles of Chambertin and a good deal of seltzer-water. Your father seemed in high spirits at first. He and the dark Englishman were playing écarté, their usual game; and the Frenchman was looking over your father's hand, now and then advising his play, now and then applauding and encouraging him. All this came out upon inquiry. The Frenchman quitted the café at a little before twelve; your father and the young Englishman stayed till long after midnight, and towards one o'clock they were heard at high words, and almost immediately afterwards the Englishman went away, leaving your father, who sent the waiter for some brandy and writing materials. He wanted to write a letter before he left, he said."

The scene-painter paused, looking anxiously at the face of his listener. The rigid intensity of that pale young face had undergone no change; the grey eyes, fixed and dilated, were turned steadily towards him.

"When the waiter took your father the things he had asked for, he found him sitting at the table with his face hidden in his hands. The man placed the brandy and writing materials upon the table, and then went away, but not before he had noticed a strange faint smell—the smell of some drug, he thought; but he had no idea then what drug. The waiter went down-stairs; all the ordinary frequenters of the place were gone, and the lights were out. The man waited up to let your father out, expecting him to come down-stairs every moment. Three o'clock struck, and the waiter went up-stairs upon the pretence of asking if anything was wanted. He found your father sitting very much as he had left him, except that this time his head was resting upon the table, which was scattered with torn scraps of paper. He was dead, Eleanor. The man gave the alarm directly, and a doctor came to give assistance, if any could have been given; but the drug which the waiter had smelt was opium, and your father had taken a quantity which would have killed the strongest man in Paris."

"Why did he do this?"

"I can scarcely tell you, my dear; but your

poor father left, among the scraps of paper upon the table, one fragment much larger and more intelligible than the rest. It is evidently part of a letter addressed to you; but it is very wildly and incoherently worded; and you must remember that it was written under circumstances of great mental excitement."

"Give it me!"

Eleanor stretched out her hand with an authoritative gesture. Richard hesitated.

"I wish you to fully understand the nature of this letter before you read it, Eleanor; I wish—"

"You kept the story of my father's death from me out of mistaken kindness," the girl said, in an unfaltering voice; "I will try and remember how good you have been to me, so that I may forgive you that; but you cannot keep from me the letter my father wrote to me before he died. That is mine; and I claim it."

"Let her see it, poor child," said the Signora.

Richard Thornton took a leather memorandum-book from one of the pockets of his loose coat. There were several papers in this book. He selected one, and handed it silently to Eleanor Vane. It was a sheet of letter-paper, written upon

in her father's hand, but a part of it had been torn away.

Even had the whole of the letter been left, the writer's style was so wild and incoherent that it would have been no easy task to understand his meaning. In its torn and fragmentary state, this scrap of writing left by George Vane was only a scribble of confused and broken sentences. The sheet of paper had been torn from the top to the bottom, so that the end of each line was missing. The following broken lines were therefore all that Eleanor could decipher, and in these the words were blotted and indistinct.

My poor Eleanor,—My poor injured
worst your cruel sister, Hortensia Bannis
could not be bad enough. I am a thief
robbed and cheated my own
been decoyed to this hell upon eart
wretches who are base enough to
a helpless old man who had trust
to be gentlemen. I cannot return
look in my child's face after
money which was to have
education. Better to die and rid
But my blood be upon the head of

who has cheated me this night out of
May he suffer as he has
forget, Eleanor, never forget Robert Lan
murderer of your helpless old
a cheat and a villain who
some day live to revenge the fate
poor old father, who prays that God will
helpless old man whose folly
madness have

There was no more. These lines were spread over the first leaf of a sheet of letter-paper; the second leaf, as well as a long strip of the first, had been torn away.

This was the only clue to the secret of his death which George Vane had left behind him.

Eleanor Vane folded the crumpled scrap of paper, and put it tenderly in her bosom. Then, falling on her knees, she clasped her hands, and lifted them towards the low ceiling of the little chamber.

"Oh, my God!" she cried; "hear the vow of a desolate creature, who has only one purpose left in life."

Signora Picirillo knelt down beside her, and tried to clasp her in her arms.

"My dear, my dear!" she pleaded; "remember how this letter was written—remember the state of your father's mind—"

"I remember nothing," answered Eleanor Vane, "except that my father tells me to revenge his murder. For he was murdered," she cried, passionately, "if this money — this wretched money, which he would have died sooner than lose—was taken from him unfairly. He was murdered. What did the wretch who robbed him care what became of the poor, broken-hearted, helpless old man whom he had wronged and cheated? What did he care? He left my father; left him in his desolation and misery; left him after having stripped and beggared him; left him to die in his despair. Listen to me, both of you, and remember what I say. I am very young, I know, but I have learnt to think and act for myself before to-day. I don't know this man's name; I never even saw his face; I don't know who he is, or where he comes from; but sooner or later I swear to be revenged upon him for my father's cruel death."

"Eleanor, Eleanor!" cried the Signora: "is this womanly? Is this Christian-like?"

The girl turned upon her. There was almost a

supernatural light, now, in the dilated grey eyes. Eleanor Vane had risen from her knees, and stood with her slender figure drawn to its fullest height, her long auburn hair streaming over her shoulders, with the low light of the setting sun shining upon the waving tresses until they glittered like molten gold. She looked, in her desperate resolution and virginal beauty, like some young martyr of the middle ages waiting to be led to the rack.

"I don't know whether it is womanly or Christian-like," she said, "but I know that it is henceforward the purpose of my life, and that it is stronger than myself."

CHAPTER IX.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE.

THE story which Richard Thornton had told Eleanor Vane was the simple record of an unhappy truth. The gay and thoughtless spendthrift, the man about town, who had outlived his age and spent three fortunes, had ended his life, by his own desperate hand, in an obscure café near the Barrière Saint Antoine.

Amongst other habits of the age in which George Vane had lived, gambling was pretty prevalent. Mr. Vane's sanguine nature, was the very nature which leads a man to the gaming-table, and holds him there under the demoniac fascination of the fatal green cloth, hoping against hope, until his pockets are empty, and he must needs crawl dispirited away, having no more money to lose.

This was the one vice of George Vane's life. He had tried to redeem his every-day extravagances

by the gamester's frenzied speculations, the gamester's subtle combinations; which are so infallible in theory, so ruinous in practice. Eleanor had never known this. If her father stayed out late at night, and she had to wait and watch for him through long weary hours of suspense and anxiety, she never knew why he stayed, or why he was often so broken down and wretched when he came home. Other people could guess the reason of the old man's midnight absences from his shabby lodging, but they were too merciful to tell his little girl the truth. In Paris, in a strange city, where his acquaintance were few, the old vice grew stronger, and George Vane spent his nights in gambling for pitiful stakes in any low haunts to which his disreputable associates deluded him. He picked up strange acquaintance in these days of his decadence, as poor people very often do: young men who were wandering about the world, penniless adventurers, professionless young reprobates, getting a very doubtful living by the exercise of their wits; men who were content to flatter and pay court to the old beau so long as they could win a few francs from him to pay for the evening's diversion.

With such men George Vane had associated for

a long time. They won pitiful sums of him, and cheated him without scruple; but his life was a very dull one, remember; he had lived for the world, and society of some kind or other was absolutely necessary to him. He clung, therefore, to these men, and was fain to accept their homage in the hour of his decline; and it was with such men as these he had spent the night before his death. It was such men as these who had robbed him of the money which, but for an unhappy accident, would have been safely handed over to the schoolmistress in the Bois de Boulogne.

The old man's death caused very little excitement in Paris. Public gambling-houses had been abolished by the order of the Government long before; and it was no longer a common thing for desperate men to scatter their brains upon the table on which they had just squandered their money; but still people knew very well that there was plenty of card-playing, and dice-throwing, and billiard-playing, always going on here and there in the brilliant city, and the suicide of a gambler more or less was not a thing to make any disturbance.

Mrs. Bannister wrote a stiffly-worded letter in

reply to that in which Richard Thornton told her of her father's death, enclosing an order on Messrs. Blount for the sum she considered sufficient to pay for the old man's funeral, and to support Eleanor for a few weeks.

"I should advise her early return to England," the stockbroker's widow wrote, "and I will endeavour to find her some decent situation—as nursery governess or milliner's apprentice, perhaps—but she must remember that I expect her to support herself, and that she must not look to me for any further assistance. I have performed my duty to my father at a considerable loss to myself, but with his death all claim upon me ceases."

George Vane had been buried during the early days of his youngest daughter's illness. They placed him amongst a cluster of neglected graves, in a patch of ground upon the outskirts of Père la Chaise, a burial-place for heretics and suicides, and Richard Thornton ordered a roughly hewn cross from one of the stonemasons near the cemetery. So, far away from the lofty monuments of the Russian princes and the marshals of the First Empire; far away from Abelard and Heloise, and all the marble chapels in which

devoted survivors pray for the souls of the beloved dead; in a desolate and unhallowed patch of weedy turf, where the bones of the departed were only suffered to rest peaceably for a given number of years, and were stirred up out of their coffins periodically to make room for new-comers, George Vane slept the last sleep. He might have been buried as a nameless suicide, but for the chance which had taken Richard Thornton to the Morgue, where he recognised Eleanor's father in the unknown dead man who had been last brought to that gloomy shelter; for he had had no papers which could give any clue to his identity about him at the time of his death.

Upon the morning after that quiet September afternoon on which Eleanor Vane had learned the true story of her father's death, Signora Picirillo for the first time spoke seriously of the future. In the intensity of her first great grief, Eleanor Vane had never once thought of the desolation of her position, nor yet of the sacrifices which the Signora and Richard were making for her sake. She never remembered that they were both lingering in Paris solely on her account; she only knew that they were there, and that she saw them daily, and that the sight of them, good

and kind as they were, was pain and weariness to her, like the sight of everything else in the world. She had been singularly quiet since the revelation made to her. After the first burst of passionate vehemence which had succeeded her perusal of her dead father's letter, her manner had grown almost unnaturally calm. She had sat all the evening apart near the window, and Richard had tried in vain to beguile her attention even for a moment. She kept silence, brooding upon the scrap of paper which lay in her bosom.

This morning she sat in a listless attitude, with her head resting on her hand. She took no heed of the Signora's busy movements from room to room. She made no effort to give her old friend any assistance in all the little household arrangements which took so long to complete, and when at last the music-mistress brought her needlework to the window, and sat down opposite the invalid, Eleanor looked up at her with a dull gaze that struck despair to the good creature's heart.

"Nelly, my dear," the Signora said, briskly, "I want to have a little serious conversation with you."

"About what, dear Signora?"

"About the future, my love."

"The future!"

Eleanor Vane uttered the word almost as if it had been meaningless to her.

"Yes, my dear. You see even I can talk hopefully of the future, though I am an old woman; but you, who are only fifteen, have a long life before you, and it is time you began to look forward to it."

"I do look forward," Eleanor said, with a gloomy expression upon her face. "I do look forward to the future; and to meeting that man, the man who caused my father's death. How am I to find him, Signora? Help me in that. You have been kind to me in everything else. Only help me to do that and I will love you better than ever I have loved you yet."

The Signora shook her head. She was a light-hearted, energetic creature, who had borne very heavy burdens through a long life; but the burdens had not been able to crush her. Perhaps her unselfishness had upheld her throughout all her trials. She had thought and cared so much for other people, that she had had little time left for thinking of herself.

"My dear Eleanor," she said, gravely, "this

will never do. You must not be influenced by that fatal letter. Your poor father had no right to lay the responsibility of his own act upon another man. If he chose to stake this unfortunate money upon the hazard of a pack of cards, and lost it, he had no right to charge this man with the consequences of his own folly."

"But the man cheated him!"

"As your father thought. People are very apt to fancy themselves cheated when they lose money."

"Papa would never have written so positively, if he had not *known* that the man cheated him. Besides, Richard says they were heard at high words; that was no doubt when my poor dear father accused this wretch of being a cheat. He and his companion were wicked, scheming men, who had good reason to hide their names. They were pitiless wretches, who had no compassion upon the poor old man who trusted them and believed in their honour. Are *you* going to defend them, Signora Picirillo?"

"Defend them, Eleanor? no: they were bad men, I have no doubt. But, my darling child, you must not begin life with hatred and vengeance in your heart."

"Not hate the man who caused my father's death?" cried Eleanor Vane. "Do you think I shall ever cease to hate him, Signora? Do you think that I shall ever forget to pray that the day may come when he and I will stand face to face, and that he may be as helpless and as dependent upon my mercy as my father was on his? Heaven help him on that day! But I don't want to talk of this, Signora: what is the use of talking? I may be an old woman, perhaps, before I meet this man; but surely, surely I shall meet him sooner or later. If I only knew his name—if I only knew his name, I think I could trace him from one end of the earth to the other. Robert Lan— Lan—what?"

Her head sank forward on her breast, and her eyes fixed themselves dreamily on the sunlit street below the open window. The French poodle, Fido, lay at her feet, and lifted up his head every now and then to lick her hand. The animal had missed his master, and had wandered about the little rooms, sniffing on the thresholds of closed doors, and moaning dismally for several days after Mr. Vane's disappearance.

The Signora sighed as she watched Eleanor. What was she to do with this girl, who had taken

a horrible vendetta upon herself at fifteen years of age, and who seemed as gloomily absorbed in her scheme of vengeance as any Corsican chieftain?

"My dear," the music-mistress said presently, with rather a sharp accent, "do you know that Richard and I will be compelled to leave Paris to-morrow?"

"Leave Paris to-morrow, Signora!"

"Yes. The Phœnix opens early in October, and our Dick will have all the scenes to paint for the new piece. Besides, there are my pupils; you know, my love, they cannot be kept together for ever unless I go back to them."

Eleanor Vane looked up with almost a bewildered expresssion, as if she had been trying to comprehend all that Signora Picirillo had said; then suddenly a light seemed to dawn upon her, and she rose from her chair and flung herself upon a hassock at the feet of her friend.

"Dear Signora," she said, clasping the music-mistress's hand in both her own, "how wicked and ungrateful I have been all this time! I forget everything but myself and my own trouble. You came over to Paris on my account. You told me so when I was ill, but I had forgotten, I

had forgotten. And Richard has stopped in Paris because of me. Oh, what can I do to repay you both, what can I do?"

Eleanor hid her face upon the Signora's lap, and wept silently. Those tears did her good; they beguiled her for a little while, at least, from the one absorbing thought of her father's melancholy fate.

Signora Picirillo tenderly smoothed the soft ripples of auburn hair lying on her lap.

"My dear Eleanor, shall I tell you what you can do to make us both very happy, and to repay us tenfold for any little sacrifice we may have made on your account?"

"Yes, yes; tell me."

"You have to choose your pathway in life, Nelly, and to choose it quickly. In all the world you have only your half-sisters and brothers to whom you can appeal for assistance. You have some claim upon them, you know, dear, but I sometimes think you are too proud to avail yourself of that claim."

Eleanor Vane lifted her head with a gesture of superb defiance.

"I would starve rather than accept a penny from Mrs. Bannister, or from her sister or

brothers. If they had been different, my father would never have died as he did. He was deserted and abandoned by all the world, except his helpless child, who could do nothing to save him."

"But if you don't mean to apply to Mrs. Bannister, what will you do, Nelly?"

Eleanor Vane shook her head hopelessly. The whole fabric of the future had been shattered by her father's desperate act. The simple dream of a life in which she was to have worked for that beloved father was over, and it seemed to Eleanor as if the future existed no longer: there was only the sad, desolate present,—a dreary spot in the great desert of life, bounded by a yawning grave.

"Why do you ask me what I mean to do, Signora?" she said piteously. "How does it matter what I do? Nothing I can do will bring my father back. I will stay in Paris, and get my living how I can, and look for the man who murdered my father."

"Eleanor," cried the Signora, "are you mad? How could you stay in Paris, when you don't know a single creature in the whole city? How, in mercy's name, could you get your living in this strange place?"

"I could be a nursery-governess; or a nursery-maid; anything! What do I care how low I sink, if I can only stay here, where I am likely to meet that man?"

"Eleanor, my dear! For pity's sake do not delude yourself in this manner. The man you want to find is an adventurer, no doubt. In Paris one day, in London another, or away in America perhaps, or at the furthest extremity of the globe. Do you hope to find this man by walking about the streets of Paris?"

"I don't know."

"How do you expect to meet him?"

"I don't know."

"But, Eleanor, be reasonable. It is utterly impossible that you can remain in Paris. If Mrs. Bannister does not claim the right of exercising some authority over you, I claim it as your oldest friend. My dear, you will not refuse to listen to me, will you?"

"No, no, dear Signora. If you think I mustn't stay in Paris, I'll go back to England, to the Miss Bennetts. They'll give me fifteen pounds a-year as junior teacher. I may as well live with them, if I mustn't stay here. I must earn some money, I suppose, before I can even

try to find the man who caused my father's death. How long it will be before I can earn anything worth speaking of!"

She sighed wearily, and fell again into a gloomy silence, from which the poodle vainly tried to arouse her by many affectionate devices.

"Then we may consider it settled, Nelly, my dear," the Signora said, cheerfully. "You will leave Paris to-morrow morning, with Richard and me. You can stay with us, my dear, till you've made up your mind what to do. We've a little spare room, which is only used now as a receptacle for empty boxes and Richard's painting litter. We'll fit it up for you, my darling, and make you as comfortable as we can."

"Dear, dear Signora!" said Eleanor, kneeling by her friend's chair. "How good you are to me. But while I have been ill there must have been a great deal of money spent: for the doctor, and the jelly, and fruit and lemonade you have given me—who found the money, Signora?"

"Your sister, Mrs. Bannister, my dear; she sent some money in answer to a letter from Richard."

Eleanor's face crimsoned suddenly, and the

music-mistress understood the meaning of that angry flush.

"Richard didn't ask for any money, my love. He only wrote to tell your sister what had happened. She sent money for all necessary expenses. It is not all gone yet, Nelly; there will be enough to pay your journey back to England; and even then something left. I have kept an account of all that has been spent, and will give it to you when you like."

Eleanor looked down at her white morning-gown.

"Is there enough left to buy a black frock?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Yes, my darling. I have thought of that. I have had mourning made for you. The dress-maker took one of your muslin frocks for a pattern, so there was no occasion to trouble you about the business."

"How good you are to me, how very, very good!"

Eleanor Vane could only say this. As yet she only dimly felt how much she owed to these people, who were bound to her by no tie of relationship, and who yet stepped aside from their own difficult pathway to do her service in her

sorrow. She could not learn to cling to them, and depend upon them yet. She had loved them long ago, in her father's lifetime; but now that he was dead, every link that had bound her to life, and love, and happiness, seemed suddenly severed, and she stood alone, groping blindly in the thick darkness of a new and dreary world, with only one light shining far away at the end of a wearisome and obscure pathway; and that a lurid and fatal star, which beckoned her onward to some unknown deed of hate and vengeance.

Heaven knows what vague scheme of retribution she cherished in her childish ignorance of the world. Perhaps she formed her ideas of life from the numerous novels she had read, in which the villain was always confounded in the last chapter, however triumphant he might be through two volumes and three-quarters of successful iniquity.

George Vane's sanguine and romantic visions of wealth and grandeur, of retaliation upon those who had neglected and forgotten him, had not been without effect upon the mind of his youngest daughter. That plastic mind had been entirely in the old man's hands, to mould in what form he pleased. Himself the slave of impulse, it was not

to be supposed that he could teach his daughter those sound principles without which man, like a rudderless vessel, floats hither and thither before every current in the sea of life. He suffered Eleanor's impulsive nature to have full sway; he put no curb upon the sanguine temperament which took everything in the extreme. As blindly as the girl loved her father, so blindly she was ready to hate those whom he called his enemies. To investigate the nature of the wrongs they had done him would have been to take their side in the quarrel. Reason and Love could not go hand-in-hand in Eleanor's creed; for the questions which Reason might ask would be so many treacheries against Love.

It is not to be wondered, then, that she held the few broken sentences written by her father, on the threshold of a shameful death, as a solemn and sacred trust not to be violated or lost sight of, though her future life should be sacrificed to the fulfilment of one purpose.

Such thoughts as these, indistinct, ignorant, and childish, perhaps, but not the less absorbing, filled her mind. It may be that this new purpose of revenge enabled her the better to endure her loss. She had something to live

for, at least. There was a light far away athwart the long gloomy pathway through an unknown world; and, however lurid that guiding star might be, it was better than total darkness.

CHAPTER X.

HORTENSIA BANNISTER HOLDS OUT A HELPING HAND.

Signora Picirillo was very well contented with her morning's work. She had obtained Eleanor's consent to a speedy departure from Paris; that was the grand point. Once away from the scene of George Vane's death, the young girl's sunshiny nature would reassert itself, and little by little the great grief would be forgotten.

In all this dreary period of sickness and misery the good music-mistress had grown to love Mr. Vane's daughter even more than she had loved her long ago, when Eleanor's childish fingers had first stumbled slowly over the keys of the piano-forte, in a feeble endeavour to master the grand difficulties of Haydn's "Surprise."

The widow's life had been a very sorrowful one. Perhaps its most tranquil period had come within the last ten years. It was ten years since,

her Italian husband and her children having one by one died, she had found herself alone in the world, with a gaunt, long-legged hobadahoy of eighteen, her dead sister's orphan son, for her sole protector.

This long-legged hobadahoy was Richard Thornton, the only child of the Signora's pretty younger sister and a dashing cavalry officer, who had married a penniless and obscure girl for the love of her pretty face, and had died within a couple of years of his marriage, leaving his widow to drag out the remnant of a fretful, helpless life in dependence upon her sister. The Signora had been used to carrying other people's burthens from a very early age. She was the eldest child of a clever violinist, for twenty years leader of the orchestra in one of the principal London theatres; and from babyhood she had been a brave-hearted, self-reliant creature. When her sister died, therefore, and with the last words upon her pale, tremulous lips prayed the Signora to protect the helpless boy, Richard Thornton, Eliza Picirillo freely accepted the charge, and promised to perform it faithfully. The poor faded beauty died with a smile upon her face, and when Signor Picirillo—who was a teacher of

languages at a few suburban schools, and a lazy, good-tempered nonentity—came home that evening, he found that there was to be another member of his domestic circle, and another mouth to be fed henceforth.

The Signora's cruse of oil held out bravely, in spite of the demands upon it; and by-and-by, when the honest-hearted music-mistress would otherwise have been terribly desolate, there was Richard, a tall lad, ready to stand by her sturdily in the battle of life, and as devoted to her as the most affectionate of sons. The boy had shown considerable talent at a very early age, but it was a versatile kind of talent which did not promise ever to burst forth into the grander gift of genius. His aunt taught him music, and he taught himself painting, intending to be something in the way of Maclise or Turner by-and-by, and scraping together some of the shillings he earned with his violin in order to attend a dingy academy somewhere in Bloomsbury.

But the great historical subjects after Maclise—"The Death of the Bloody Boar at Bosworth," a grand battle scene, with a lurid sunset in the background, and Richmond's face and armour all ablaze with crimson lake and gamboge, from

the flaming reflection of the skies, was the *magnum opus* which poor Dick fondly hoped to see in the Royal Academy—were not very saleable; and the Turneresque landscapes, nymphs and ruins, dryads and satyrs, dimly visible through yellow mist and rose-coloured fog, cost a great deal of time and money to produce, and were not easily convertible into ready cash. So, when Richard had gone the usual weary round amongst the picture-dealers, and had endured the usual heart-burnings and agonies which wait upon ambitious youth, he was glad to accept the brush flung aside by a scene-painter at the Phœnix, where Dick received a scanty salary as second violinist; a salary which was doubled when the young man practised the double duty of second violin and assistant scene-painter.

These simple people were the only friends of Eleanor Vane's childhood. They were ready to accept the responsibility of her future welfare now, when her rich sister would have sent her into the world, lonely and helpless, to sink to the abject drudgery which well-to-do people speak so complacently of, when they recommend their poor relations to get an honest living and trouble them no longer.

Richard Thornton was enraptured at the idea of taking this beautiful younger sister home with him, although that idea involved the necessity of working for her till she was able to do something for herself.

"Nothing could be better for us than all this sad business, aunty," the scene-painter said when he called in the Rue de l'Archevêque, and found his aunt alone in the little sitting-room. Eleanor was lying down after the morning's excitement, while her friend packed her slender wardrobe and made all preparations for departure. "Nothing could be better for us," the young man said. "Why, Nell's golden hair will light up the Pilasters with perpetual sunshine, and I shall always have a model for my subject-pictures. Then what a companion she'll be for you in the long dreary nights when I am away at the Phœnix, and how capitally she'll be able to help you with your pupils; for, of course, she plays and sings, like anything, by this time."

"But she wants to go back to the people at the Brixton school, Dick."

"But, Lord bless you, aunty, we won't let her go," cried Mr. Thornton; "we'll make a prima donna or a leading tragedy-actress, or something

of that kind, of her. We'll teach her to make a hundred pounds a-week out of her white arms and her flashing grey eyes. How beautiful she looked last night when she was on her knees, vowing vengeance against that scoundrel who won her father's money. How splendid she looked with her yellow hair all streaming over her shoulders, and her eyes flashing sparks of fire! Wouldn't she bring the house down, if she did that at the Phœnix? She's a wonderful girl, aunty; the sort of girl to set all London in a blaze some day, somehow or other. Miss Bennett's and Brixton, indeed!" cried Richard, snapping his fingers contemptuously, "you could no more chain that girl down to a governess's drudgery, than you could make a flash of forked lightning do duty for a farthing candle."

So Eleanor Vane went back to England with her friends. They chose the Dieppe and Newhaven route for its economy; and over the same sunlit landscape upon which she had gazed so rapturously less than a month ago, Eleanor's eyes wandered now wearily and sadly, seeing nothing but desolation wherever they looked. She recognised swelling hills and broad patches of low verdure, winding glimpses of the river, far-away

villages glimmering whitely in the distance, and she wondered at the change in herself which made all these things so different to her. What a child she had been a month ago; what a reckless, happy child, looking forward in foolish certainty to a long life with her father; ignorant of all sorrows except the petty troubles she had shared with him; ready to hope for anything in the boundless future; with a whole fairy-land of pleasure and delight spreading out before her eager feet!

Now she was a woman, alone in a horrible desert, over whose dreary sands she must toil slowly to the end she hoped to reach.

She sat back in a corner of the second-class carriage with her face hidden in a veil, and with the dog Fido curled up in her lap. Her father had been fond of the faithful creature, she remembered.

It was early in the grey bleakness of a September morning when the cab, carrying Eleanor and her friends, rattled under an archway leading out of Dudley Street, Bloomsbury, into the queer little retreat called the Pilasters. The grooms were already at work in the mews, and the neighbourhood was enlivened by that hissing noise

with which horses are generally beguiled during the trials of the equine toilet. The chimney-sweep had left his abode and was whooping dismally in Northumberland Square. Life began early in the Pilasters, and already the inmates of many houses were astir, and the sharp voices of mothers clamoured denunciations on the elder daughters who acted as unsalaried nursemaids to the younger branches of the family.

The place popularly known as the Pilasters is one of the queerest nooks in London. It consists of a row of tumble-down houses, fronted by a dilapidated colonnade, and filled with busy life from cellar to attic. But I do not believe that the inhabitants of the Pilasters are guilty of nefarious practices, or that vice and crime find a hiding-place in the cellars below the colonnade. The retreat stands by itself, hidden between two highly respectable middle-class streets, whose inhabitants would scarcely tolerate Alsatian habits or Field Lane proclivities in their near neighbours. Small tradesmen find a home in the Pilasters, and emerge thence to work for the best families in Dudley Street and "the Squares."

Here, amongst small tailors and mantua-makers, cheap eating-houses, shabby beer-shops,

chimney-sweeps and mangles, Signora Picirillo had taken up her abode, bringing her faded goods and chattels, the remnants of brighter times, to furnish the first-floor over a shoemaker's shop. I am afraid the shoemaker was oftener employed in mending old shoes than in making new ones, but the Signora was fain to ignore that fact, and to be contented with her good fortune in having found a very cheap lodging in a central neighbourhood.

This was a shabbier place than any that Eleanor Vane had ever lived in, but she showed no distaste for its simple arrangements. The Signora's hopes were realised by-and-by. At first the girl sat all day in a despondent attitude, with the French poodle in her lap, her head drooping on her breast, her eyes fixed on vacancy, her whole manner giving evidence of an all-absorbing grief which was nearly akin to despair. She went to Brixton very soon after her return to England; but here a cruel disappointment awaited her. The Misses Bennett heard her sorrowful story with pitiful murmurs of regret and compassion; but they had engaged a young person as junior teacher, and could do nothing to help her. She returned to the Pilasters, looking the image of

pale despair; but the Signora and Richard both declared to her that nothing could be happier for them than her consenting to remain with them.

So it seemed very much as if the Pilasters was to be Eleanor Vane's permanent abode. The neighbours had stared at her a great deal at first, admiring her pale face and flowing hair, and pitying her because of her black frock; but they were familiar with her now, and gave her good day in a friendly manner as she passed under the shadow of the colonnade on her way out or in.

Little by little the air of dull despondency gave way before this young woman's earnest desire to be of use to the people who were so kind to her. She played remarkably well, for she had had plenty of the drudgery of pianoforte-playing at the Brixton school, and she was able to take some of the Signora's pupils off her hands. She sang, too, in a rich contralto, which promised to be powerful and beautiful by-and-by; and she practised the ballads in the old operas which the Signora kept, neatly bound, but yellow with age, in her feeble music-stand.

As her friends had hoped, her sunshiny nature reasserted itself. The outer evidences of her great sorrow gradually passed away, though the

memory of her loss still filled her mind; the image of her father, and the thought of that father's unhappy death, were still for ever present with her. It was not in her nature to be long reserved or unsocial; and by-and-by, when she had been nearly six months in her new home, and the London sparrows were chirping in the bright spring sunshine about the mews and under the colonnade, Miss Vane began to sing at her work as she flitted to and fro in the low rooms, dusting the grand pianoforte and the old china—touching up the frame of Richard's unsaleable picture, the flaring Battle of Bosworth, which illuminated one side of the room. Wherever she went the faithful French poodle ran frisking by her side; whatever sunshine could find its way into the dusky London chamber seemed to concentrate itself about her golden head. Gaiety, life, and brightness, went with her up and down the dark staircase—in and out of the dingy rooms. Her youth and beauty turned the shabby lodging into a fairy palace, as it seemed to Richard and his aunt. When she sat down and ran her agile fingers over the piano, dashing into fantasias and scenas, sparkling and rippling with joyous treble meanderings

among the upper notes, the old Clementi grew young again beneath her touch, the worn-out strings were revivified by the wondrous magnetism of her youth and vitality. The flute-like treble trills and triplets seemed like the joyous chirpings of a hundred birds. The music-mistress and the scene-painter used to sit and watch her as she played; their admiring eyes followed her as she flitted to and fro, and they wondered at her grace and beauty.

She had her father's aristocratic elegance, her father's power of fascination. All the dangerous gifts which had been so fatal to George Vane, were inherited by his youngest daughter. Like him, a creature of impulse, spontaneous, sanguine, volatile, she influenced other people by the force of her own superabundant vitality. In her bright hopefulness she made an atmosphere of hope in which other people grew hopeful. The dullest rejoiced in her joyous vivacity, her unconscious loveliness. Yes, perhaps Eleanor Vane's greatest charm lay in her utter ignorance of the fact that she was charming. In the three years' drudgery of a boarding-school she had never learned the power of her own fascination. She knew that people loved her, and she was grateful

to them for their affection; but she had never discovered that it was by some wondrous magnetic attraction inherent in herself, that she obtained so much love and devotion.

Nobody had ever taken the trouble to tell her that she was beautiful. She had generally worn shabby frocks, and the rippling golden hair had not very often been smooth; so perhaps the school-girls at Brixton scarcely knew how lovely their companion was. The delicate aquiline profile, the flashing grey eyes, pale face, red lips, and amber hair, were counterbalanced by the silk dresses and lace furbelows of young ladies, whose wealthy fathers paid full price for their education. Poverty learns its place in the little world of a young ladies' boarding-school quite as surely as in the larger world beyond the garden wall which bounds that establishment. But Eleanor had held her own at the Misses Bennett's seminary, by some mysterious power against which her richer companions had in vain rebelled. Her frank acknowledgment of her poverty, coupled with the fact of her father's former wealth and grandeur, perhaps enabled her to do this. If she wore shabby frocks, she looked more aristocratic in her shabbiness than

the other young ladies in their stiff silks and prim finery. They recognised this fact, they acknowledged something in their playfellow which lifted her above themselves, and the half-boarder dealt out patronage and regal condescensions to the most remunerative pupils in the school. She reigned by reason of her unacknowledged beauty, and that divine something, dimly recognised by all about her, but as yet wholly undeveloped. The school-girl was clever, brilliant, fascinating, but it was yet to be discovered what the woman would be. It was yet to be discovered whether these budding qualities would develope into the many flowers of a bright and versatile mind, or burst forth suddenly and mysteriously into that rare tropical blossom, that mental once-in-a-century flourishing aloe, which men call Genius. The good music-mistress watched her young protégée with love and wonder, not unalloyed by fear. What was she to do with this strange and beautiful bird which she had brought home to her nest? Would it be right to fetter this bright spirit for ever? Was it fair to immure all this joyous loveliness in that shabby lodging; to stifle such superabundant vitality in the close atmosphere of a dull and monotonous existence?

The faithful creature had been accustomed to consider others, and she thought of this seriously and constantly. Eleanor was contented and happy. She was earning money now by giving lessons here and there, and she contributed to the family purse. The days slipped by very rapidly, as it seemed, in that peaceful monotony. Miss Vane's frocks appeared to grow shorter and shorter as the young lady sprang up into bright womanhood. She was nearly seventeen now, and had been more than a year and a half living under the shadow of the Bloomsbury Pilasters. Richard and his aunt consulted together as to what her future life ought to be; but they never came nearer to any conclusion.

"It's all very well to talk of her going away from us, you know, aunty," the scene-painter said; "but what are we to do without her? All the sunshine and poetry of our lives will go away with her when she leaves us! Besides! what is she to be? A governess? Bah! who would doom her to that lady-like drudgery? An actress? No, aunty carissima, I should never like to see that bright young beauty behind the glare of the foot-lights. I think I'd rather she

should live here for ever and ever, than that her nature should ever be vulgarised by contact with the world. Let us keep her, aunty; she doesn't want to leave us. Those who have any actual claim upon her have abandoned her. She came across my pathway like some wandering homeless angel. I shall never forget her face when I first saw it on the lamplit boulevard, and recognised the little girl I had known three years before in the fair-haired young beauty of fifteen. She doesn't want to go away. Why should you talk of her leaving us, aunty dear?"

Signora Picirillo shrugged her shoulders with a sigh.

"Heaven knows I have no wish to part with her, Dick," she said; "but we ought to do what's right for her sake. This is no place for George Vane's daughter."

But while the music-mistress and her nephew were speculating and theorising upon the future of their protégée, practical Mrs. Bannister was contemplating the infliction of a death-blow which was to shatter the happiness of the humble Bloomsbury circle with one merciless stroke. Early in the bleak March of 1855, Eleanor received a coldly-worded epistle from her half-

sister, to the effect that an opportunity had now arisen for her advancement in life; and that if she wished ever to attain a *respectable* position —the adjective was mercilessly underlined—she would do well to avail herself of it. For further information and advice she was to call early the next morning in Hyde Park Gardens. Miss Vane would fain have left this letter unanswered, and at first stoutly refused to obey Mrs. Bannister's summons.

"What do I want with her condescension and patronage?" she said, indignantly. "Does she think that I forget the cruel letter she wrote to my father; or that I forgive her for its heartless insolence? Let her keep her favours for those who solicit them. I want nothing from her. I only want to be left in peace with the friends I love. Do you wish to get rid of me, Signora, that you persuade me to dance attendance upon Mrs. Bannister?"

It was very hard for poor Signora Picirillo to be compelled to urge the child's acceptance of the hand so coldly extended to her, but the good creature felt that it was her duty to do so, and Miss Vane loved her protectress far too dearly to persist in opposing her. She went, therefore,

early the next morning to her half-sister's house at Bayswater, where the spacious rooms seemed doubly spacious when compared with the little sitting-room over the colonnade, the sitting-room which was more than half filled by Clementi's old-fashioned piano. Here the gorgeous Erard's grand, in a case of carved walnut wood and ebony, and with all manner of newfangled improvements, was only an oasis upon the great desert of velvet piles.

Hortensia Bannister was pleased to be very gracious to her half-sister. Perhaps she was all the more so because Eleanor made no pretence of affection for her. This cold, hard-natured woman would have been suspicious of mercenary motives lurking beneath any demonstration of sisterly love.

"I am glad to hear you have been learning to get your own living, Eleanor," she said, "and above all, that you have been cultivating your talent for the piano. I have not forgotten you, you will find. The people with whom you have been living sent me their address when they brought you from Paris, and I knew where to find you when any opportunity should present itself for your advancement. This opportunity

has now presented itself. My old acquaintance, Mrs. Darrell, the niece of your father's friend, Maurice de Crespigny, who is still living, though very old and infirm, has written to me saying that she requires a young person who would act as companion and musical governess to a lady who lives with her. This young lady is no relation of Mrs. Darrell's, but is a kind of ward or pupil, I believe. Your youth, in this instance, Eleanor, happens to be an advantage, as the young lady requires a companion of her own age. You will receive a moderate salary, and will be treated as a member of the family. Let me hear you play, by-the-by, in order that I may be able to speak positively as to your qualifications."

Eleanor Vane sat down to the piano. The strings of the Erard vibrated under her touch. She was almost frightened at the grand tones that came out of the instrument as she dashed over the keys. She played very brilliantly, however, and her sister condescended to say so.

"I think I may conscientiously give a good account of your playing," she said. "You sing, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes."

"Very well, then; I think you may consider

the engagement a settled thing. There is only one question to arrange. Of course you must be aware that the position which your father occupied was once a very elevated one. Mrs. Darrell and her sisters knew your father in his most prosperous days, and lost sight of him before he became poor. They know nothing of his second marriage, or of your birth. His most intimate friend was Mr. de Crespigny, the uncle of the lady whose house I wish you to enter. Under these circumstances you cannot wonder when I tell you that I should strongly object to Mrs. Darrell's knowing who you really are."

"How do you mean, Hortensia?"

"I mean that I shall recommend you as a young person in whose career I feel interested. If you go to Hazlewood at all, you must go under an assumed name."

"Hortensia!"

"Well!" cried Mrs. Bannister, lifting her handsome black eyebrows.

"I don't want this situation, and I should hate to take a false name. I would rather stay with my friends, please. I love them very dearly, and am very happy with them."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Bannister,

"what is the use of trying to do some people a service? Here have I been scheming as to how I could manage to avail myself of this chance, and now this ungrateful girl turns round and tells me she doesn't want the situation. Do you know what you are refusing, Eleanor Vane? Have you learnt your father's habit of pauperism, that you prefer to be a burden upon this penniless music-teacher and her son, or nephew, or whatever he is, rather than make an honest effort to get your own living?"

Eleanor started up from the piano: she had been sitting before it until now, softly fingering the keys, and admiring the beauty of the tones. She started up, looking at her sister, and blushing indignantly to the very roots of her auburn hair.

Could this be true? Could she be indeed a burden to the friends she loved so dearly?

"If you think that, Hortensia," she said, "if you think I am any burden to the dear Signora, or Richard, I will take any situation you like, however hard. I'll toil night and day, and work my fingers to the bone, rather than be a trouble or a burden to them any longer."

She remembered how little she earned by her few pupils. Yes, Hortensia was no doubt right.

She was a burden to those good people who had taken her to their home in her hour of desolation and misery.

"I'll take the situation, Hortensia," she cried. "I'll take a false name. I'll do anything in the world rather than impose upon the goodness of my friends."

"Very well," answered Mrs. Bannister, coldly. "Pray do not let us have any heroics about it. The situation is a very good one, I can assure you; and there are many girls who would be glad to snap at such a chance. I will write to my friend, Mrs. Darrell, and recommend you to her notice. I can do no more. I cannot, of course, ensure you success; but Ellen Darrell and I were great friends some years since, and I know that I have considerable influence with her. I'll write and tell you the result of my recommendation."

Eleanor left Hyde Park Gardens after taking two or three sips of some pale sherry which her half-sister gave her. The wine seemed of a sorry vintage, and tasted very much as if the grapes of which it was made had never seen the sun. Miss Vane was glad to set down her wine-glass and escape from the cold splendour of her half-sister's drawing-room.

She walked slowly and sorrowfully back to Bloomsbury. She was to leave her dear friends there; leave the shabby rooms in which she had been so happy, and to go out into the bleak world a dependant upon grand people, so low and humiliated that even her own name must be abandoned by her before she could enter upon the state of dependence. The Bohemian sociality of the Pilasters was to be exchanged for the dreary splendour of a household in which she was to be something a little above the servants.

But it would be cowardly and selfish to refuse this situation, for no doubt cruel Mrs. Bannister had spoken the truth. Eleanor began to think that she had been a burden upon her poor friends.

She was very gloomy and despondent, brooding upon these things, but through every gloomy thought of the present a darker image loomed, far away in the black future. This was the image of her vengeance, the vague and uncertain shadow that had filled her girlish dreams ever since the great sorrow of her father's death had fallen upon her.

"If I go to Hazlewood," she thought, "if I spend my life at Mrs. Darrell's, how can I ever hope to find the murderer of my father?"

CHAPTER XI.

RICHARD THORNTON'S PROMISE.

ELEANOR VANE looked very sadly at all the common, every-day sights connected with the domestic economy of the Pilasters, when she went back to Bloomsbury, after her interview with Mrs. Bannister. She had only lived a year and a-half in that humble locality, but it was in her nature to become quickly attached to places as well as persons, and she had grown very fond of the Pilasters. Everybody about the place knew her and loved her. The horses looked out of their open stable-doors as she passed; the dogs came tumbling from their kennels, dragging half-a-dozen yards of rusty iron chain and a heap of straw at their heels, to greet her as she went by; the chimney-sweeps' children courted her notice; and at all the little shops where she had been wont to give orders and pay bills for the Signora, the simple tradespeople tendered her

their admiration and homage. Her beauty was a pride to the worthy citizens of the Pilasters. Could all Bloomsbury, from Dudley Street to the Squares, produce sunnier golden hair or brighter grey eyes than were to be seen under the shadow of the dilapidated colonnade when Eleanor Vane went by?

In this atmosphere of love and admiration, the girl had been very happy. She had one of those natures in which there lies a wondrous power of assimilation with the manners and habits of others. She was never out of place; she was never in the way. She was not ambitious. Her sunny temperament was the centre of perpetual peace and happiness, only to be disturbed by very terrible thunder-claps of sorrow. She had been very happy with the Signora; and to-day she looked sadly round the little sitting-room, her eyes resting now on the old piano, now on a shelf of tattered books, romances dear to Richard and herself, and not too well treated by either; now on the young man's flaming *magnum opus*, the picture she had loved to criticise and abuse in mischievous enjoyment of the painter's anguish. As she looked at these things, and remembered how soon she must go away from them,

the slow tears trickled down her cheeks, and she stood despondent on the gloomy threshold of her new life.

She had found the familiar rooms empty upon her return from Bayswater, for the Signora was away teaching beyond the regions of the New Road, and Richard was hard at work at the Phœnix, where there were always new pieces to be produced and new scenes to be painted. Eleanor had the little sitting-room all .to herself; she took off her bonnet and sat down upon the old-fashioned chintz-covered sofa. She buried her head in the cushions and tried to think.

The prospect of a new existence which would have been delightful to most girls of her age, was utterly distasteful to her. Her nature was adhesive; she would have gone to the furthest end of the world with her father if he had lived, or with Richard and the Signora, whom she loved only less than she had loved him. But to sever every tie, and go out alone into the world with nothing between her and desolation, was unspeakably terrible to this affectionate, impulsive girl.

If it had been simply a question of her own

advantage, if by the sacrifice of her own advancement, her every prospect in life, she might have stayed with the friends she loved, she would not have hesitated for a moment. But it was not so. Mrs. Bannister had clearly told her that she was a burden upon these generous people who had sheltered and succoured her in her hour of misery. The cruel word pauperism had been flung in her teeth, and with a racking brain this poor girl set herself to calculate how much her maintenance cost her friends, and how much she was able to contribute out of her own pitiful earnings.

Alas! the balance told against her when the sum was done. Her earnings were very, very small as yet; not because her talent was unappreciated, but because her pupils were poor, and a music-mistress, whose address was Bloomsbury Pilasters, could scarcely demand high payment for her services, or hope to obtain a very aristocratic connection.

No, Mrs. Bannister—stern, uncompromising, and disagreeable as the truth itself—had no doubt been right. Her duty lay before her, plainly indicated by that unpleasant monitor. She was bound to leave these dear friends, and to

go out into the world to fight a lonely battle for herself.

"I may be able to do something for them," she thought; and this thought was the only gleam of light which illumined the darkness of her sorrow. "I may be able to save money enough to buy the Signora a black silk dress, and Richard a meerschaum. I should so like to buy Dick a meerschaum; I know the one he'd like—a bull-dog's head, with a silver collar round the neck. We looked at it one night at a shop in Holborn."

She rose from the sofa at last with an aching heart and troubled brain, when the early shadows of the spring twilight were gathering in the room. She made up the fire and swept the hearth, and arranged the tea-things on the comfortable round table, and then sat down on a low stool by the fender to toast great rounds of bread, which would be as nothing in comparison to Richard's all-devouring capacity after a hard day's work in the scene-room at the Phœnix. How pleasant it was to perform all these little familiar offices of love and duty. How sorrowfully she looked back to her simple, free-and-easy life, now that she was to go amongst strangers who would exact all manner

of ceremonious observances from her. The Bohemianism of her existence had been its greatest charm; and this poor benighted girl trembled at the prospect of a life in which she would have to go through all those terrible performances which she had read of, fearfully and wonderingly, in certain erudite essays upon Etiquette, but which had never yet come within the range of her experiences.

"It is my duty to go away from them," she kept saying to herself; "it is my duty to go away."

She had schooled herself in this difficult duty by the time her friends came home, and she told them very quietly that she had seen Mrs. Bannister, and had agreed to accept her patronage and services.

"I am going to be a sort of companion or musical governess—I scarcely know which—to a young lady at a country house called Hazlewood," she said. "Don't think I am not sorry to leave you, dear Signora, but Hortensia says it is better that I should do so."

"And don't think that I am not sorry to lose you, Nelly, when I tell you that I think your sister is right," the Signora answered gently, as she kissed her protégée.

Perhaps Eleanor was a little disappointed at this reply. She little dreamed how often Eliza Picirillo had struggled against the selfishness of her affection, before she had grown thus resigned to this parting.

Mr. Richard Thornton groaned aloud.

"I shall go out and pull down a couple of the Pilasters, and bury myself under them, à la Samson," he said piteously. "What is to become of us without you, Eleanor? Who will come over to the Phœnix, and applaud my great scenes with the ferule of an umbrella? Who'll cut up half-quartern loaves into toast when I am hungry, or have Welsh rarebits in readiness on the hob, when I come home late at night? Who'll play Mendelssohn's 'Songs without Words' to me, and darn my stockings, and sew buttons—absurd institutions, invented by ignorant people, who have never known the blessing of pins—upon my shirts? Who'll abuse me when I go unshaven, or recommend blacking as an embellishment for my boots? Who'll career in and out of the room with a dirty white French poodle at her heels, looking like a fair-haired Esmeralda with a curly-coated goat? What are we to do without you, Eleanor?"

There was a sharp pain at poor Dick's heart as he apostrophised his adopted sister. Were his feelings quite brotherly? was there no twinge of the fatal torture so common to mankind mingled with this young man's feelings as he looked at the beautiful face opposite to him, and remembered how soon it would have vanished from that shabby chamber, leaving only dismal emptiness behind?

The Signora looked at her nephew and sighed. Yes, it was far better that Eleanor should go away. She could never have grown to love this honest-hearted, candid, slovenly scene-painter, whose coat was a perfect landscape in distemper by reason of the many coloured splashes which adorned it.

"My poor Dick would have fallen in love with her, and would have broken his good, honest heart," Eliza Picirillo said. "I'm very glad she's going away."

So from the road which Destiny had appointed for her to tread, there was not one voice to call Eleanor Vane aside. The affectionate and the indifferent alike conspired to urge her onward. It was only her own inclination that would have held her back.

"If I could have stayed in London," she thought, "there might have been some chance of my meeting that man. All scamps and villains come to hide themselves in London. But in a quiet country village I shall be buried alive. When I pass the threshold of Mrs. Darrell's house, I bid good-bye to the hope of crossing that man's pathway."

The letter came very quickly from Mrs. Bannister. Mrs. Darrell had accepted her dear friend's recommendation, and was ready to receive Miss Vincent. It was under this name the stockbroker's widow had introduced her half-sister to the notice of her friend.

"You will receive a salary of thirty pounds a year," Hortensia Bannister wrote, "and your duties will be very light. Do not forget that your name at Hazlewood is to be Vincent, and that you are carefully to avoid all reference to your father. You will be amongst people who knew him well; and must, therefore, be on your guard. I have described you as the orphan daughter of a gentleman who died in reduced circumstances, and have thus strictly adhered to the truth. No questions will be asked of you, as Mrs. Darrell is satisfied with my recommenda-

tion, and is too well bred to feel any vulgar curiosity as to your past history. I send you, per parcel delivery, a box of dresses and other wearing apparel, which will be of use to you. I also send you five pounds for such little extra expenditure as may be necessary. Hazlewood is thirty miles from London, and about seven from Windsor. You will go down by the Great Western, and stop at Slough, where a conveyance will meet you; but I will write further upon this matter before you go. Mrs. Darrell has kindly accorded you a fortnight's delay for such preparations as you may require to make. You will be expected at Hazlewood on the 6th of April.

"I have only one other remark to make. I know that your father cherished a foolish notion upon the subject of the Woodlands property. Pray bear in mind that no such idea has ever been entertained by me. I know the Darrell family quite well enough to feel assured that they will take care of their own rights, which I am content to acknowledge. Remember, therefore, that I have no wish or expectation with regard to Maurice de Crespigny's will; but it is, on the other hand, perfectly true, that in his youth he

did make a solemn promise that, in the event of his dying a bachelor, he would leave that money to my father or his heirs."

Eleanor Vane took very little notice of this final paragraph in her sister's letter. Who cared for Maurice de Crespigny's fortune? What was the good of it *now?* It could not bring her father back to life; it could not blot out that quiet, unwitnessed death-scene in the Parisian café; it could not rehabilitate the broken name, or restore the shattered life. What could it matter who inherited the useless dross?

The fortnight passed in a feverish unsatisfactory manner. Richard and the Signora took care to conceal the poignancy of their regret at parting with the girl who had brought such new brightness into their narrow lives. Eleanor wept by stealth; dropping many bitter tears over her work, as she remodelled Mrs. Bannister's silk dresses, reducing those garments to the dimensions of her own girlish figure. The last night came by-and-by, the night of the 5th of April, the eve of a sorrowful parting, and the beginning of a new existence.

It happened to be a Sunday evening, and Eleanor and Richard walked out together in the

quiet Bloomsbury streets while the bells were ringing for evening service, and the lamps glimmering dimly from the church windows. They chose the loneliest streets in the old-fashioned middle-class quarter. Eleanor was very pale, very silent. This evening walk had been her express desire, and Richard watched her wonderingly. Her face had an expression which he remembered in the Rue de l'Archevêque, when he had told her the story of her father's death—an unnaturally rigid look, strangely opposed to the changeful brightness common to that youthful countenance.

They had strolled slowly hither and thither in the deserted streets for some time. The bells had ceased ringing, and the church-goers had all disappeared. The grey twilight was stealing into the streets and squares, and the lights began to shine out from the lower windows.

"How quiet you are, Nelly," Richard said at last; "why were you so anxious that we should come out together alone, my dear? I fancied you had something particular to say to me."

"I have something particular to say."

"What about?" asked Mr. Thornton.

He looked thoughtfully at his companion. He could only see her profile—that clearly-defined,

almost classical outline—for she had not turned towards him when she spoke. Her grey eyes looked straight before her into empty space, and her lips were tightly compressed.

"You love me, don't you, Richard?" she asked presently, with a suddenness that startled the scene-painter.

Poor Dick blushed crimson at that alarming inquiry. How could she be so cruel as to ask him such a question? For the last fortnight he had been fighting with himself—sturdily and honestly—in the heroic desire to put away this one fatal thought from his mind; and now the girl for whose sake he had been doing battle with his own selfishness, struck the tenderest of all chords with her ignorant hand, and wounded her victim to the very quick.

But Miss Vane had no consciousness of the mischief she had done. Coquetry was an unknown science to this girl of seventeen. In all matters connected with that womanly accomplishment she was as much a child now that her seventeenth birthday was past, as she had been in the old days at Chelsea when she had upset Richard's colour-boxes and made grotesque copies of his paintings.

"I know you love me, Dick," she continued, "quite as much as if I were your real sister, instead of a poor desolate girl who flung herself upon you and yours in the day of her affliction. I know you love me, Dick, and would do almost anything for my sake, and I wanted to speak to you to-night alone, because I am going to say something that would distress the dear Signora, if she were to hear it."

"What is it, my dear?"

"You remember the story of my father's death?"

"Only too well, Eleanor."

"And you remember the vow I made when you told me that story, Richard?"

The young man hesitated.

"Yes, I do remember, Nelly," he said, after a pause; "but I had hoped that you had forgotten that foolish vow. For it was foolish, you know, my dear, as well as unwomanly," the young man added gravely.

Eleanor eyes flashed defiance upon her friend, as she turned to him for the first time that evening.

"Yes," she cried, "you thought that I had forgotten, because I was not always talking of that

man who caused my father's death. You thought my sorrow for my father was only childish grief, that was to be forgotten when I turned my back upon the country where he lies in his abandoned grave—his unconsecrated grave! You thought that nobody would ever try to avenge the poor, lonely old man's murder—for it was a murder, Richard Thornton! What did the wretch who robbed him care for the anguish of the heart he broke? What did he care what became of his victim? It was as base and cruel a murder as was ever done upon this earth, Richard, though the world would not call it by that name."

"Eleanor, my dear Eleanor! why do you talk of these things?"

The girl's voice had risen with the vehemence of her passion, and Richard Thornton dreaded the effect which this kind of conversation might have upon her excitable nature.

"Nelly, my dear," he said, "it would be better to forget all this. What good can you do by cherishing these painful recollections? You are never likely to meet this man; you do not even know his name. He was a scamp and an adventurer, no doubt; he may be dead by this time. He may have done something to bring himself

within the power of the law, and he may be in prison, or transported."

"He may have done something to bring himself within the power of the law," repeated Eleanor. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that he may have committed some crime for which he could be punished."

"Could he be punished by the law for having cheated my father at cards?"

"That sort of charge is always difficult to be proved, Nell; impossible to be proved after the fact. No, I'm afraid the law could never touch him for that."

"But if he were to commit some other crime, he might be punished?"

"Of course."

"If I met him, Richard," cried Eleanor Vane, with a dangerous light kindling in her eyes, "I would try and lure him on to commit some crime, and then turn round upon him and say, 'The law of the land could not avenge my father's death, but it can punish you for a lesser crime. I have twisted the law to my own purpose, and made it redress my father's wrongs.'"

Richard Thornton stared aghast at his companion.

"Why, Eleanor," he exclaimed, "you talk like a Red Indian! This is quite shocking. You frighten me, really; you do indeed."

"I am sorry for that, Richard," Miss Vane answered meekly. She was a child in all things which concerned her affections alone. "I wouldn't grieve you or the dear Signora for the world. But there are some things that are stronger than ourselves, Richard, and the oath that I took a year and a-half ago, in the Rue de l'Archevêque, is one of those things. I have never forgotten, Dick. Night after night—though I've been happy and light-hearted enough in the day, for I could not be otherwise than happy with you and the Signora—night after night I have lain awake thinking of my father's death. If that death had been a common one; if he had died in my arms at the will of God instead of by the cruelty of a wretch, my grief might have worn itself out by this time. But as it is, I cannot forget; I cannot forgive. If all the Christian people in the world were to talk to me, I could never have one merciful feeling towards this man. If he were going to be hung to morrow, I should be glad; and could walk barefoot to the place of his execution to see him suffer. There is no treachery that I should think

base if employed against him. There is no slow torture I could inflict upon him that would seem cruel enough to satisfy my hatred of him. Think what a helpless old man my father was; a broken-down gentleman; the sort of man whom everybody pities, whom everybody respects. Remember this; and then remember the cold-blooded deliberation of the wretch who cheated him out of the money which was more than money to him—which represented honour—honesty—his child's future—all he valued. Remember the remorseless cruelty of the wretch who looked on while this helpless old man suffered a slow agony of six or seven hours' duration, and then left him alone in his despair. Think of this, Richard Thornton, and don't wonder any longer if my feelings towards this man are not *Christian-like*."

"My dear Eleanor, if I regret the vehemence of your feeling upon this subject, I do not defend the man whose treachery hurried your father to his unhappy death; I only wish to convince you of the folly you commit in cherishing these ideas of vengeance and retribution. Life is not a three-volume novel or a five-act play, you know, Nelly. The sudden meetings and strange coincidences common in novels are not very general

in our every-day existence. It is not at all likely that in the whole course of your life you will ever again encounter this man. From the moment of your father's death all clue to him was lost; for it was only your father who could have told us who and what he was, or, at least, who and what he represented himself to be. He is lost in the vast chaos of humanity now, my dear, and you have not the frailest clue by which you might hope to find him. For Heaven's sake, then, abandon all thought of an impossible revenge. Have you forgotten the words we heard in the Epistle a few weeks ago—'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord?' If the melo-dramatic revenge of the stage is not practicable in real life, we know at least, my dear—for you see we have it from very high authority—that wicked deeds do not go unpunished. Far away at the remotest limits of the earth, this man, whom your puny efforts would be powerless to injure, may suffer for his crime. Try and think of this, Eleanor."

"*I cannot*," answered the girl. "The letter which my father wrote me before he died was a direct charge which I will never disobey. The only inheritance I received from him was that

letter; that letter in which he told me to avenge his death. I dare say you think me mad as well as wicked, Richard; but in spite of all you have said, *I believe that I shall meet that man!*"

The scene-painter sighed and relapsed into despondent silence. How could he argue with this girl? What could he do but love and admire her, and entrust himself to her direction if she had need of a slave. While he was thinking this, Eleanor clasped both her hands upon his arm and looked up earnestly in his face.

"Richard," she said in a low voice, "I think you would serve me if you had the power."

"I would go through fire and water to do so, Nelly."

"I want you to help me in this matter. You know as little of this man as I do, but you are much cleverer than me. You mix with other people and see something of the world; not much, I know, but still a great deal more than I do. I am going away into a quiet country place, where there is no possible chance of meeting this man; you will stay in London—"

"Where I may brush against him in the streets any day, Nell, without being a shade the wiser as

to his identity. My dear child, for any practical purpose you will be as near the man in Berkshire as I shall be in Bloomsbury. Don't let's talk of him any longer, Nelly. I can't tell you how this subject distresses me."

"I won't leave off talking of him," said the young lady, resolutely, "until you have made me a promise."

"What promise?"

"That if ever you do come across any clue which may lead to the identification of the man I want to find, you will follow it up, patiently and faithfully, sparing neither trouble nor cost; for my sake, Richard, for my sake. Will you promise?"

"I will, my dear," Mr. Thornton answered. "I do promise, and I will keep my promise honestly if ever the chance of doing so should come to me. But I must tell you frankly, Nell, I don't believe it ever will."

"Bless you for the promise, notwithstanding, Richard," Eleanor said, warmly. "It has made me much happier. There will be two people henceforth, instead of one, set against this man."

A dark frown overshadowed her face. It seemed as if she had uttered those last few words

in the form of a threat and a defiance, which the man, whoever he was, and wherever he was, might hear.

"You know all the strange things they say now about second sight, clairvoyance, odic force magnetic attraction—all sorts of long words whose meaning I don't understand, Richard—I wonder sometimes if this man *knows* that I hate him, and that I am watching for him, thinking of him, praying to meet him day and night. Perhaps he does know this and will hold himself on his guard against me, and try and avoid me."

Richard shrank from entering upon this subject; the conversation had been altogether disagreeable to him. There was a horrible discrepancy between this girl's innocent youthful beauty and all this determined talk of fierce and eager vengeance, which would have been more natural to a Highland or Corsican chieftain, than to a young lady of seventeen.

It was dark now, and they went back to the Pilasters, where Eliza Picirillo was spending that last night very mournfully. The shabby room was only illumined by the glimmer of a low fire, for the Signora had not cared to light the candles until her two children came home. She had

been sitting by the dingy window watching for their return, and had fallen asleep in the darkness.

There is no need to dwell upon that last night. It was like the eves of all partings, very sad, very uncomfortable. Everything was disorganised by that approaching sorrow. Conversation was desultory and forced, and Richard was glad to be employed in cording Eleanor's boxes. She had two trunks now, and had a wardrobe that seemed to her magnificent, so liberally had Mrs. Bannister bestowed her cast-off dresses upon her half-sister.

So the last night passed away, the April morning came, and Eleanor's new life began.

CHAPTER XII.

GILBERT MONCKTON.

ELEANOR VANE was not to go down to Berkshire alone. The beginning of her new life, that terrible beginning which she so much dreaded, was to make her acquainted with new people.

She had received the following communication from Mrs. Darrell.

"*Hazlewood, April 3rd,* 1855.

"Madam,

"As it would of course be very improper for a young lady of your age to travel alone, I have provided against that contingency.

"My friend, Mr. Monckton, has kindly promised to meet you in the first-class waiting-room at the Great Western Station, at three o'clock on Monday afternoon. He will drive you here on his way home.

"I am, Madam,

"Yours faithfully,

"ELLEN DARRELL."

Eliza Picirillo worked harder upon a Monday than on any other day in the week. She left the Pilasters immediately after an early breakfast, to go upon a wearisome round amongst her pupils. Richard was in the thick of the preparations for a new piece, so poor Eleanor was obliged to go alone to the station, to meet the stranger who had been appointed as her escort to Hazlewood.

She quite broke down when the time came for bidding farewell to her old friend. She clung about the Signora, weeping unrestrainedly for the first time.

"I can't bear to go away from you," she sobbed piteously, "I can't bear to say good-by."

"But, my love," the music-mistress answered tenderly, "if you really don't wish to go—"

"No, no, it isn't that. I feel that I must go—that—"

"And I, too, my dear girl. I believe you would do very wrong in refusing this situation. But Nelly, my darling, remember that this is only an experiment. You may not be happy at Hazlewood. In that case you will not fail to remember that your home is always here; that come to it when you may, you will never fail to find a loving welcome; and that the friends you leave behind

you here are friends whom nothing upon earth can ever estrange from you. Remember this, Eleanor."

"Yes, yes, dear, dear Signora."

"If I could have gone with her to the station, I shouldn't have cared so much," Richard murmured despondently, "but the laws of Spavin and Cromshaw are as the laws of Draco. If I don't get on with the Swiss châlet and moonlit Alpine peaks, the new piece can't come out on Monday."

So poor Eleanor went to the station alone, and was overcharged by the cabman who carried the two trunks which Richard had neatly addressed to Miss Vincent, Hazlewood, Berks.

She was received by a civil porter, who took charge of her luggage while she went to the waiting-room to look for the stranger who was to be her escort.

She was no more a coquette than she had been nearly two years before when she travelled alone between London and Paris, and she was prepared to accept the services of this stranger quite as frankly as she had accepted the care and protection of the elderly gentleman who had taken charge of her upon that occasion.

But how was she to recognise the stranger? She could not walk up to every gentleman in the waiting-room, to ask him if he were Mr. Monckton.

She had in almost all her wanderings travelled in second-class carriages, and waited in second-class waiting-rooms. She shrank back, therefore, rather timidly upon the threshold of the spacious carpeted saloon, and looked a little nervously at the occupants of that gorgeous chamber. There was a group of ladies near the fireplace, and there were three gentlemen in different parts of the room. One of these gentlemen was a little man with grey hair and a red face; the other was very young and very sandy; the third was a tall man of about forty, with close-cut black hair, and a square massive face and head, not exactly a handsome face, perhaps, but a countenance not easily to be overlooked.

This tall man was standing near one of the windows, reading a newspaper. He looked up as Eleanor pushed open the swinging door.

"I wonder which of them is Mr. Monckton," she thought. "Not that fidgety young man with the red hair, I hope."

While she still stood doubtfully upon the

threshold, hesitating what to do—she little knew what a pretty picture she made in that timid, fluttering attitude—the tall man threw down his newspaper upon the sofa beside him, and walked across the room to where she stood.

"Miss Vincent, I believe?" he said.

Eleanor blushed at the sound of that false name, and then bent her head in reply to the question. She could not say yes. She could not fall into this disagreeable falsehood all at once.

"I am Mrs. Darrell's friend and legal adviser, Mr. Monckton," the gentleman said, "and I shall be very happy to perform the duty she has entrusted to me. We are in very good time, Miss Vincent. I know that young ladies are generally *ultra* punctual upon these occasions; and I came very early in order to anticipate you, if possible."

Eleanor did not speak. She was looking furtively at the face of Mrs. Darrell's friend and legal adviser. A good and wise adviser, Miss Vane thought: for the face, not strictly handsome, seemed to bear in its every feature the stamp of three qualities—goodness, wisdom, and strength.

"I am sure he is very good," she thought; "but I would not like to offend him for the

world, for though he looks so kind now, I know he must be terrible when he's angry."

She looked almost fearfully at the strongly-marked black eyebrows, thinking what a stormy darkness must overshadow the massive face when they contracted over the grave, brown eyes—serious and earnest eyes, but with a latent fire lurking somewhere in their calm depths, Eleanor thought.

The girl's mind rambled on thus while she stood by the stranger's side in the sunlit window. Already the blackness of her new life was broken by this prominent figure standing boldly out upon its very threshold. Already she was learning to be interested in new people.

"He isn't a bit like a lawyer," she thought; "I fancied lawyers were always shabby old men, with blue bags. The men who used to come to Chelsea after papa were always nasty disagreeable men, with papers about the Queen and Richard Roe."

Mr. Monckton looked thoughtfully down at the girl by his side. There was a vein of silent poetry, and there were dim glimpses of artistic feeling hidden somewhere in the nature of this man, very far below the hard, business-like ex-

terior which he presented to the world. He felt a quiet pleasure in looking at Eleanor's young beauty. It was her youthfulness, perhaps, her almost childlike innocence, which made her greatest charm. Her face was not that of a common beauty: her aquiline nose, grey eyes, and firmly-moulded mouth had a certain air of queenliness very rarely to be seen; but the youth of the soul shining out of the clear eyes was visible in every glance, in every change of expression.

"Do you know much of Berkshire, Miss Vincent?" the lawyer asked, presently.

"Oh, no, I have never been there."

"You are very young, and I daresay have never left home before?" Mr. Monckton said. He was wondering that no relative or friend had accompanied the girl to the station.

"I have been at school," Eleanor answered; "but I have never been away from home before—to—to get my own living."

"I thought not. Your papa and mamma must be very sorry to lose you?"

"I have neither father nor mother."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Monckton; "that's strange."

Then after a pause he said, in a low voice:

"I think the young lady you are going to will like you all the better for that."

"Why?" Eleanor asked involuntarily.

"Because she has never known either father or mother."

"Poor girl!" murmured Eleanor; "they are both dead, then?"

The lawyer did not answer this question. He was so far professional, even in his conversation with Miss Vane, that he asked a great many more questions than he answered.

"Do you like going to Hazlewood, Miss Vincent?" he said, by-and-by, rather abruptly.

"Not very much."

"Why not?"

"Because I am leaving very dear friends to go to—"

"Strangers, who may illtreat you, eh?" muttered Mr. Monckton. "You need have no apprehension of that sort of thing, I assure you, Miss Vincent. Mrs. Darrell is rather rigid in her ideas of life; she has had her disappointments, poor soul, and you must be patient with her: but Laura Mason, the young lady who is to be your companion, is the gentlest and most affectionate

girl in Christendom, I should think. She is a sort of ward of mine, and her future life is in my hands; a very heavy responsibility, Miss Vincent; she will have plenty of money by-and-by—houses, and horses, and carriages, and servants, and all the outer paraphernalia of happiness: but Heaven knows if she will be happy, poor girl. She has never known either mother or father. She has lived with all manner of respectable matrons, who have promised to do a mother's duty to her, and have tried to do it, I daresay; but she has never had a mother, Miss Vincent. I am always sorry for her when I think of that."

The lawyer sighed heavily, and his thoughts seemed to wander away from the young lady in his charge. He still stood at the window, looking out at the bustle on the platform, but not seeing it, I think, and took no further notice of Eleanor until the bell rang for the starting of the train.

"Come, Miss Vincent," he said, rousing himself suddenly from his reverie; "I have forgotten all about your ticket. I'll put you into a carriage, and then send a porter for it."

Mr. Monckton scarcely spoke to his companion half a dozen times during the brief journey to Slough. He sat with a newspaper before him,

but Eleanor noticed that he never turned its leaves, and once, when she caught a glimpse of the lawyer's face, she saw that it wore the same gloomy and abstracted expression that she had observed upon it as Mr. Monckton stood in the window of the waiting-room.

"He must be very fond of his ward," she thought, "or he could never be so sorry because she has no mother. I thought lawyers were hard, cruel men, who cared for nothing in the world. I always used to fancy my sister Hortensia ought to have been a lawyer."

By-and-by, as they drew very near to the station, Mr. Monckton dropped his newspaper with another sigh, and turning to Eleanor, said, in a low, confidential voice:

"I hope you will be very good to Laura Mason, Miss Vincent. Remember that she stands quite alone in the world; and that however friendless, however desolate you may be—I say this because you tell me you are an orphan—you can never be so friendless or so desolate as she is."

CHAPTER XIII.

HAZLEWOOD.

A PHAETON and pair was in waiting for Mr. Monckton outside the Slough station. The vehicle was very plain, but had a certain quiet elegance of its own, and the horses had been sold at Tattersall's for something over five hundred pounds.

Eleanor Vane's spirits rose in spite of herself as she sat by the lawyer's side, driving at a rapid rate through the pretty pastoral country. They crossed the river almost immediately after leaving Slough, and dashed into Berkshire. They skirted Windsor Park and Forest, leaving the black outline of the castle keep behind them; and then turned into a quiet country road, where the green banks were dotted by clumps of early primroses, and the whitethorns were bursting into flower.

Eleanor looked rapturously at all this rural beauty. She was a Cockney, poor child, and her

experience of the country was confined to rambles in Greenwich Park, or on Richmond Terrace; happy rambles with her father, prior to expensive dinners at the Crown and Sceptre, or the Star and Garter, as the case might be.

But the country, the genuine country, the long roads and patches of common, the glimpses of wood and water, the great deserts of arable land, the scattered farm-houses, and noisy farm-yards; all these were strange and new to her, and her soul expanded in the unfamiliar atmosphere.

If that drive could have lasted for ever, it would have been very delightful; but she knew that those splendid chestnut horses were carrying her at a terrible rate to her new home. Her new home! What right had she to call Hazlewood by that name? She was not going home. She was going to her first situation.

All the pride of birth, the foolish and mistaken pride in shipwrecked fortune and squandered wealth which this girl's weak-minded father had instilled into her, arose and rebelled against this bitter thought. What humiliation Mrs. Bannister's cruelty had inflicted upon her!

She was thinking this when Mr. Monckton

suddenly turned his horses' heads away from the main road, and the phaeton entered a lane above which the branches of the still leafless trees made an overarching roof of delicate tracery.

At the end of this lane, in which the primroses seemed to grow thicker than in any other part of the country, there were some low wooden gates, and an old-fashioned iron lamp-post. On the other side of the gates there was a wide lawn shut in by a shrubbery and a grove of trees, and beyond the lawn glimmered the sunlit windows of a low white house; a rambling cottage, whose walls were half-hidden by trellis-work and ivy, and not one of whose windows or chimneys owned a fellowship with the others.

Pigeons were cooing and hens clucking somewhere behind the house, a horse began to neigh as the carriage stopped, and three dogs, one very big, and two very little ones, ran out upon the lawn, and barked furiously at the phaeton.

Eleanor Vane could not help thinking the low-roofed, white-walled, ivy-covered irregular cottage very pretty, even though it *was* Hazlewood.

While the dogs were barking their loudest, a delicate little figure, in fluttering draperies of

white and blue, came floating out of a window under the shadow of a verandah, and ran towards the gates.

It was the figure of a young lady, very fragile-looking and graceful. A young lady whose complexion was fairer than a snow-drop, and whose loose floating hair was of the palest shade of flaxen.

"Be quiet, Julius Cæsar; be quiet, Mark Antony," she cried, to the dogs, who ran up to her and leaped and whirled about her, jumping almost higher than her head in an excess of canine spirits. "Be quiet, you big, wicked Julius Cæsar, or you shall go back to the stables, sir. Is this the way you behave yourself when I've had ever so much trouble to get you a half-holiday? Please, don't mind them, Miss Vincent," the young lady added, opening the gate, and looking up pleadingly at Eleanor; "they're only noisy. They wouldn't hurt you for the world; and they'll love you very much by-and-by, when they come to know you. I've been watching for you such a time, Mr. Monckton. The train must have been very slow this afternoon!"

"The train travelled at its usual speed, neither

slower nor faster," the lawyer said, with a quiet smile, as he handed Eleanor out of the phaeton. He left the horses in the care of the groom, and walked on to the lawn with the two girls. The dogs left off barking at a word from him, though they had made very light of Miss Mason's entreaties. They seemed to know him, and to be accustomed to obey him.

"I know the afternoon *seemed* dreadfully long," the young lady said. "I thought the train *must* be behind its time."

"And, of course, you never thought of looking at your watch, Miss Mason," the lawyer said, pointing to a quantity of jewelled toys which hung at the young lady's blue sash.

"What's the good of looking at one's watch, if one's watch won't go?" said Miss Mason; "the sun has been going down ever so long, but the sun's so changeable, there's no relying on it. Mrs. Darrell has gone out in the pony-carriage to call upon some people near Woodlands."

Eleanor Vane started at the sudden mention of a name which had been so familiar to her from her dead father's lips.

"So I am all alone," continued Miss Mason, "and I'm very glad of that; because we shall get

to know each other so much better by ourselves; shan't we, Miss Vincent?"

George Monckton had been walking between the two girls, but Laura Mason came round to Eleanor, and put her hand in that of Miss Vane. It was a fat little childish hand, but there were rings glittering upon it, small as it was.

"I think I shall like you very much," Miss Mason whispered. "Do you think you shall like me?"

She looked up into Eleanor's face, with an entreating expression in her blue eyes; they were really blue eyes, a bright forget-me-not, or turquoise blue, as different as possible from Eleanor's clear gray ones, which were for ever changing, sometimes purple, sometimes brown, sometimes black.

How could Miss Vane reply to this childish question, except in the affirmative? She had every inclination to love the babyish young lady, who was so ready to cling to her and confide in her. She had expected to find a haughty heiress who would have flaunted her wealth before her penniless companion. But she had another reason for inclining tenderly towards this girl. She re-

membered what Mr. Monckton had said to her in the railway carriage.

"However friendless or desolate you may be, you can never be so friendless and desolate as she is."

Eleanor pressed the hand that clung to hers, and said, gravely:

"I'm sure I shall love you, Miss Mason, if you'll let me."

"And you'll not be dreadful, about triplets and arpeggios, and cinquepated passages?" the young lady said, piteously. "I don't mind music a bit, in a general way, you know; but I never could play triplets in time."

She led the way into a sitting-room under the verandah, as she talked. Eleanor went with her, hand-in-hand, and Mr. Monckton followed, keeping an attentive watch upon the two girls.

The sitting-room was, like the exterior of the cottage, very irregular and very pretty. It stood at one end of the house, and there were windows upon three sides of the room,—an oriel at the end opposite the door, a bay opening on to the verandah, and three latticed windows with deep oaken seats upon the other side.

The furniture was pretty, but very simple and

inexpensive. The chintz curtains and chair-covers were sprinkled with rose-buds and butterflies; the chairs and tables were of shining maple-wood; and there was a good supply of old china arranged here and there upon brackets and cabinets of obsolete form. The pale cream-coloured walls were hung with a few prints and water-coloured sketches; but beyond this the chamber had no adornments.

Laura Mason led Eleanor to one of the window-seats, where a litter of fancy-work, and two or three open books tumbled carelessly here and there amongst floss-silks and Berlin wools and scraps of embroidery, gave token of the young lady's habits.

"Will you take off your things here," she said, "or shall I show you your own room at once? It's the blue room, next to mine. There's a door between the two rooms, so we shall be able to talk to each other whenever we like. How dreadfully you must want something to eat after your journey! Shall I ring for cake and wine, or shall we wait for tea? We always drink tea at seven, and we dine very early; not like Mr. Monckton, who has a grand late dinner every evening."

The lawyer sighed.

"Rather a desolate dinner, sometimes, Miss Mason," he said, gravely; "but you remind me that I shall be hardly in time for it, and my poor housekeeper makes herself wretched when the fish is spoiled."

He looked at his watch.

"Six o'clock, I declare; good-bye, Laura; good-by, Miss Vincent. I hope you will be happy at Hazlewood."

"I am *sure* I shall be happy with Miss Mason," Eleanor answered.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Monckton, elevating his straight black eyebrows, "is she so very fascinating, then? I'm sorry for it," he muttered under his breath as he walked off after shaking hands with the two girls.

They heard the phaeton driving away three minutes afterwards.

Laura Mason shrugged her shoulders with an air of relief.

"I'm glad he's gone," she said.

"But you like him very much. He's very good, isn't he?"

"Oh, yes, very, very good, and I do like him. But I'm afraid of him, I think, because he's so

good. He always seems to be watching one and finding out one's faults. And he seems so sorry because I'm frivolous, and I can't help being frivolous when I'm happy."

"And are you always happy?" Eleanor asked. She thought it very possible that this young heiress, who had never known any of those bitter troubles which Miss Vane had found associated with "money matters," might indeed be *always* happy. But Laura Mason shook her head.

"Always, except when I think," she said; "but when I think about papa and mamma, and wonder who they were, and why I never knew them, I can't help feeling very unhappy."

"They died when you were very young, then?" Eleanor said.

Laura Mason shook her head with a sorrowful gesture.

"I scarcely know when they died," she answered; "I know that I can remember nothing about them; the first thing I recollect is being with a lady, far down in Devonshire—a lady who took the charge of several little girls. I stayed with her till I was ten years old, and then I was sent to a fashionable school at Bayswater, and I

stayed there till I was fifteen, and then I came here, and I've been here two years and a-half. Mr. Monckton is my guardian, you know, and he says I am a very lucky girl, and will have plenty of money by-and-by; but what's the use of money if one has no relations in all the wide world? and he tells me to attend to my education, and not to be frivolous, or care for dress and jewellery, but to try and become a good woman. He talks to me very seriously, and almost frightens me sometimes with his grave manner; but, for all that, he's very kind, and lets me have almost everything I ask him for. He's tremendously rich himself, you know, though he is only a professional man, and he lives at a beautiful place four miles from here, called Tolldale Priory. I used to ask him questions about papa and mamma, but he would never tell me anything. So now I never speak to him about them."

She sighed as she finished speaking, and was silent for some few minutes; but she very quickly recovered her spirits, and conducted Eleanor to a pretty rustic chamber with a lattice window looking on to the lawn.

"Mrs. Darrell's man is gone to fetch your luggage," Miss Mason said, "so you must have my

brushes and combs, please, for your hair, and then we'll go down to tea."

She led Eleanor into the adjoining apartment, where the dressing-table was littered with all manner of womanly frivolities, and here Miss Vane re-arranged her luxuriant golden-brown hair, which no longer was allowed to fall about her shoulders in rippling curls, but was drawn simply away from her forehead, and rolled in a knot at the back of her head. She was a woman now, and had begun the battle of life.

A pony-carriage drove up to the gate while Eleanor was standing at the glass by the open window, and Mrs. Darrell got out and walked across the lawn towards the house.

She was a tall woman, unusually tall for a woman, and she was dressed in black silk, which hung about her angular limbs in heavy, lustreless folds. Eleanor could see that her face was pale, and her eyes black and flashing.

The two girls went down stairs hand-in-hand. Tea was prepared in the dining-room, a long wainscoted apartment older than the rest of the house, and rather gloomy looking. Three narrow windows upon one side of this room looked towards the shrubbery and grove at the back of

the house, and the trunks of the trees looked gaunt and black in the spring twilight. A fire was burning upon the low hearth, and a maid-servant was lighting a lamp in the centre of the table as the two girls went in.

Mrs. Darrell welcomed her dependant very politely; but there was a harshness and a stiffness in her politeness which reminded Eleanor of her half-sister, Mrs. Bannister. The two women seemed to belong to the same school, Miss Vane thought.

The lamplight shone full upon Mrs. Darrell's face, and Eleanor could see now that the face was a handsome one, though faded and careworn. The widow's hair was grey, but her eyes retained the flashing brightness of youth. They were very dark and lustrous, but their expression was scarcely pleasant. There was too much of the hawk or eagle in their penetrating glance.

But Laura Mason did not seem at all afraid of her protectress.

"Miss Vincent and I are good friends already, Mrs. Darrell," she said, gaily, "and we shall be as happy together as the day is long, I hope."

"And I hope Miss Vincent will teach you industrious habits, Laura," Mrs. Darrell answered gravely.

Miss Mason made a grimace with her pretty red under-lip.

Eleanor took the seat indicated to her, a seat at the end of the dining-table, and exactly opposite to Mrs. Darrell, who sat with her back to the fireplace.

Sitting here, Eleanor could scarcely fail to observe an oil painting—the only picture in the room—which hung over the mantelpiece. It was the portrait of a young man, with dark hair clustering about a handsome forehead, regular features, a pale complexion, and black eyes. The face was very handsome, very aristocratic, but there was a want of youthfulness, an absence of the fresh, eager spirit of boyhood in its expression. A look of listless hauteur hung like a cloud over the almost faultless features.

Mrs. Darrell watched Eleanor's eyes as the girl looked at this picture.

"You are looking at my son, Miss Vincent," she said; "but perhaps it is scarcely necessary to tell you so. People say there is a strong likeness between us."

There was indeed a very striking resemblance between the faded face below and the pictured face above. But it seemed to Eleanor Vane as if

the mother's face, faded and careworn though it was, was almost the younger of the two. The listless indifference, the utter lack of energy in the lad's countenance, was so much the more striking when contrasted with the youthfulness of the features.

"Yes," exclaimed Laura Mason, "that is Mrs. Darrell's only son, Launcelot Darrell. Isn't that a romantic name, Miss Vincent?"

Eleanor started. This Launcelot Darrell was the young man she had heard her father speak of; the man who expected to inherit the De Crespigny estate. How often she had heard his name! It was he, then, who would have stood between her father and fortune, had that dear father lived; or whose claim of kindred would, perhaps, have had to make way for the more sacred right of friendship.

And this young man's portrait was hanging in the room where she sat. He lived in the house, perhaps. Where should he live except in his mother's house?

But Eleanor's mind was soon relieved upon this point, for Laura Mason, in the pauses of the business of the tea-table, talked a good deal about the original of the portrait.

"Don't you think him handsome, Miss Vincent?" she asked, without waiting for an answer. "But of course you do; everybody thinks him handsome; and then Mrs. Darrell says he's so elegant, so tall, so aristocratic. He is almost sure to have Woodlands by-and-by, and all Mr. de Crespigny's money. But of course you don't know Woodlands or Mr. de Crespigny. How should you, when you've never been in Berkshire before? And he—not Mr. de Crespigny, he's a nasty, fidgety, hypochon—what's its name—old man?—but Launcelot Darrell is *so* accomplished. He's an artist, you know, and all the water-coloured sketches in the drawing-room and the breakfast-parlour are his; and he plays and sings, and he dances exquisitely, and he rides and plays cricket, and he's a—what you may call it—a crack shot; and, in short, he's an Admirable Crichton. You musn't fancy I'm in love with him, you know, Miss Vincent," the young lady added, blushing and laughing, "because I never saw him in my life, and I only know all this by hearsay."

"You never saw him!" repeated Eleanor.

Launcelot Darrell did not live at Hazlewood, then.

"No," the widow interposed; "my son has enemies, I am sorry to say, amongst his own kindred. Instead of occupying the position his talents, to say nothing of his birth, entitle him to, he has been compelled to go out to India in a mercantile capacity. I do not wonder that his spirit rebels against such an injustice. I do not wonder that he cannot forgive."

Mrs. Darrell's face darkened as she spoke, and she sighed heavily. By-and-by, when the two girls were alone together in the breakfast-room, Laura Mason alluded to the conversation at the tea-table.

"I don't think I ought to have talked about Launcelot Darrell," she said; "I know his mother is unhappy about him, though I don't exactly know why. You see his two aunts who live at Woodlands are nasty, scheming old maids, and they contrived to keep him away from his great-uncle, Mr. de Crespigny, who is expected to leave him all his money. Indeed, I don't see who else he can leave it to now. There was an old man —a college friend of Mr. de Crespigny's—who expected to get the Woodlands estate; but of course that was an absurd idea; and the old man —the father of that very Mrs. Bannister who

recommended you to Mrs. Darrell, by-the-by, is dead. So all chance of that sort of thing is over."

"And Mr. Launcelot Darrell is sure to have the fortune?" Eleanor said, interrogatively, after a very long pause.

"Well, I don't know about that; but I've heard Mrs. Darrell say that Launcelot was a great favourite of Mr. de Crespigny's when he was a boy. But those two cantankerous old maids, Mrs. Darrell's sisters, are nagging at the old man night and day, and they may persuade him at last, or they may have succeeded in persuading him, perhaps, ever so long ago, to make a will in their favour. Of course all this makes Mrs. Darrell very unhappy. She idolises her son, who is an only child, and was terribly spoiled when he was a boy, they say; and she does not know whether he will be a rich man or a pauper."

"And, in the meantime, Mr. Darrell is in India?"

"Yes. He went to India three years ago. He's overseer to an indigo-planter up the country, at some place with an unpronounceable name, hundreds and hundreds of miles from Calcutta. He's not at all happy, I believe, and he very seldom writes—not above once in a twelvemonth."

"He is not a good son, then," Eleanor said.

"Oh, I don't know about that! Mrs. Darrell never complains, and she's very proud of him. She always speaks of him as 'my son.' But, of course, what with one thing and another, she is often very unhappy. So, if she is a little severe, now and then, we'll try and bear with her, won't we, Eleanor? I may call you Eleanor, mayn't I?"

The pretty flaxen head dropped upon Miss Vane's shoulder, as the heiress asked this question, and the blue eyes were lifted pleadingly.

"Yes, yes; I would much rather be called Eleanor than Miss Vincent."

"And you'll call me Laura. Nobody ever calls me Miss Mason except Mr. Monckton when he lectures me. We shall be very, very happy together, I hope, Eleanor."

"I hope so, dear."

There was a sudden pang of mingled fear and remorse at Eleanor Vane's heart as she said this. Was she to be happy, and to forget the purpose of her life? Was she to be happy, and false to the memory of her murdered father? In this quiet country life; in this pleasant girlish companionship which was so new to her; was she to abandon that one dark dream, that one deeply-

rooted desire which had been in her mind ever since her father's untimely death?

She recoiled with a shudder of dread from the simple happiness which threatened to lull her to a Sybarite rest; in which that deadly design might lose its force, and, little by little, fade out of her mind.

She disengaged herself from the slight arms which had encircled her in a half-childish caress, and rose suddenly to her feet.

"Laura," she cried, "Laura, you mustn't talk to me like this. My life is not like yours. I have something to do,—I have a purpose to achieve; a purpose before which every thought of my mind, every impulse of my heart, must give way."

"What purpose, Eleanor?" asked Laura Mason, almost alarmed by the energy of her companion's manner.

"I cannot tell you. It is a secret," Miss Vane replied.

Then sitting down once more in the deep window-seat by Laura's side, Eleanor Vane drew her arm tenderly round the frightened girl's waist.

"I'll try and do my duty to you, Laura, dear,"

she said, "and I know I shall be happy with you. But if ever you see me dull and silent, you'll understand, dear, that there is a secret in my life, and that there is a hidden purpose in my mind that sooner or later must be achieved. Sooner or later," she repeated, with a sigh, "but Heaven only knows when."

She was silent and absent-minded during the rest of the evening, though she played one of her most elaborate fantasias at Mrs. Darrell's request, and perfectly satisfied that lady's expectations by the brilliancy of her touch. She was very glad when, at ten o'clock, the two women servants of the simple household and a hobadahoyish young man, who looked after the pony and pigs and poultry-yard, and smelt very strongly of the stable, came in to hear prayers read by Mrs. Darrell.

"I know you're tired, dear," Laura Mason said, as she bade Eleanor good night at the door of her bed-room, "so I won't ask you to talk to me to-night. Get to bed, and go to sleep at once, dear."

But Eleanor did not go to bed immediately; nor did she fall asleep until very late that night.

She unfastened one of her trunks, and took

from it a little locked morocco casket, which held a few valueless and old-fashioned trinkets that had been her mother's, and the crumpled fragment of her father's last letter.

She sat at the little dressing-table, reading the disjointed sentences in that melancholy letter, before she undressed, and then replaced the scrap of paper in the casket.

She looked at the lawn and shrubbery. The shining leaves of the evergreens trembled in the soft April breeze, and shimmered in the moonlight. All was silent in that simple rustic retreat. The bare branches of the tall trees near the low white gates were sharply defined against the sky. High up in the tranquil heavens the full moon shone out from a pale background of fleecy cloud.

The beauty of the scene made a very powerful impression upon Eleanor Vane. The window from which she had been accustomed to look in Bloomsbury abutted on a yard, a narrow gorge of dirt and disorder, between the dismal back walls of high London houses.

"I ought never to have come here," Eleanor thought bitterly, as she let fall her dimity window curtain and shut out the splendour of the night.

"I ought to have stayed in London; there was some hope of my meeting that man in London, where strange things are always happening. But here—"

She fell into a gloomy reverie. Secluded in that quiet rustic retreat, what hope could she have of advancing, by so much as one footstep, upon the dark road she had appointed for herself to tread?

It was very long before she fell asleep. She lay for hours, tumbling and tossing feverishly upon her comfortable bed.

The memories of her old life mingled themselves with thoughts of her new existence. She was haunted now by the recollection of her father, and her father's death; now by her fresh experiences of Hazlewood, by the widow's grey hair and penetrating gaze, and by the pictured face of Launcelot Darrell.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN.

THE course of Eleanor's life at Hazlewood was peaceful and monotonous. She had been engaged simply as a "companion" for Laura Mason. That common epithet which is so often twisted into the signification of a household drudge—an upper-servant, who works harder than any of her fellows—in this case meant purely and simply what it was originally intended to mean. Eleanor's only duties were to teach Laura Mason music, and to be the companion and associate of all her girlish pleasures and industries.

Not that Miss Mason was very industrious. She had a habit of beginning great undertakings in the way of fancy work, and the more gigantic the design the more ardent was her desire to attempt it—but she rarely got beyond the initiative part of her labour. There was always some "Dweller on the Threshold" in the shape of a

stitch that couldn't be learnt, or a skein of silk that couldn't be matched, or a pattern that *wouldn't* come right; and one after another of the gigantic undertakings was flung aside to decay in dusty oblivion, or to be finished by Eleanor or Mrs. Darrell.

Laura Mason was not made for the active service of life. She was one of the holiday soldiers in the great army, fit for nothing but to wear gilded epaulettes and gorgeous uniforms, and to turn out upon gala days to the sound of trumpet and drum.

She was a loving, generous-hearted, confiding creature; but, like some rudderless boat drifting hither and thither before a stormy ocean, this frivolous, purposeless girl flung herself, helpless and dependent, upon the mercy of other people.

The rich City solicitor, Mr. Monckton, the head of a celebrated legal firm familiar in the Bankruptcy Court, took the trouble to say very little about his pretty, flaxen-haired, and blue-eyed ward.

He spoke of her, indeed, with an almost pointed indifference. She was the daughter of some people he had known in his early youth, he said, and her fortune had been entrusted to his care. She

would be rich, but he was none the less anxious about her future. A woman was not generally any the safer in this world for being an heiress. This was all Gilbert Monckton had ever said to Mrs. Darrell upon the subject of his ward's past history. Laura herself had talked freely enough of her first two homes. There was little to tell, but, upon the other hand, there seemed nothing to conceal.

Upon one subject Mr. Monckton was very strict, and that was the seclusion of the home he had chosen for his ward.

"When Miss Mason is of age she will of course choose for herself," he said; "but until that time comes I must beg, Mrs. Darrell, that you will keep her out of all society."

Under these circumstances it was especially necessary that Laura Mason should have a companion of her own age. Hazlewood was a hermitage, never approached by any visitors except some half-dozen elderly ladies, who were intimate with Mrs. Darrell, and Mr. Monckton, who came about once a fortnight to dine and spend the evening.

He used to devote himself very much to Laura and her companion during these visits. Eleanor could see how earnestly he watched the flaxen-

haired girl, whose childish simplicity no doubt made her very bewitching to the grave man of business. He watched her and listened to her; sometimes with a pleased smile, sometimes with an anxious expression on his face; but his attention very rarely wandered from her.

"He must love her very dearly," Eleanor thought, remembering how earnestly he had spoken in the railway carriage.

She wondered what was the nature of the affection which the solicitor felt for his ward. He was old enough to be her father, it was true, but he was still in the prime of life; he had not that beauty of feature and complexion which a schoolgirl calls handsome, but he had a face which leaves its impress upon the minds of those who look at it.

He was very clever, or at least he seemed so to Eleanor; for there was no subject ever mentioned, no topic ever discussed, with which he did not appear thoroughly familiar, and upon which his opinions were not original and forcible. Eleanor's intellect expanded under the influence of this superior masculine intelligence. Her plastic mind, so ready to take any impression, was newly moulded by its contact with this stronger brain. Her education, very imperfect before, seemed to com-

plete itself now by this occasional association with a clever man.

Of course all this came about by slow degrees. She did not very rapidly become familiar with Gilbert Monckton, for his grave manner was rather calculated to inspire diffidence in a very young woman; but little by little, as she grew accustomed to his society, accustomed to sit quietly in the shade, only speaking now and then, while Laura Mason talked familiarly to her guardian, she began to discover how much she had gained from her association with the lawyer. It was not without some bitterness of spirit that Eleanor Vane thought of this. She felt as if she had been an interloper in that quiet Hazlewood household. What right had she to come between Laura and her guardian, and steal the advantages Mr. Monckton intended for his ward? It was for Laura's sake he had been earnest or elouqent; it was for Laura's benefit he had described this, or explained that. What right, then, had she, Eleanor, to remember what Laura had forgotten, or to avail herself of the advantages Laura was too frivolous to value?

There was a gulf between the two girls that could not be passed, even by affection. Eleanor

Vane's mental superiority placed her so high above Laura Mason that perfect confidence could not exist between them. Eleanor's love for the light-hearted, heedless girl, had something almost motherly in its nature.

"I know we shall never quite understand each other, Laura," she said; "but I think I could give up my life for your sake, my dear."

"Or I for you, Nelly."

"No, no, Laura. I know you are unselfish as an angel, and you'd wish to do so; but yours is not the giving-up nature, my darling. You'd die under a great sorrow."

"I think I should, Nelly," the girl answered, drawing closer to her friend, and trembling at the very thought of calamity; "but how you speak, dear. Had you ever a great sorrow?"

"Yes, a very great one."

"And yet you are happy with us, and can sing and play, and ramble about in the woods with me, Nell, as if you had nothing on your mind."

"Yes, Laura, but I can remember my sorrow all the time. It is hidden so deep in my heart that the sunshine never reaches it, however happy I may seem."

Laura Mason sighed. The spoiled child of fortune could not help wondering how she would act under the influence of a great misery. She would sit down upon the ground in some darkened room, she thought, and cry until her heart broke and she died.

The summer faded into autumn, and autumn into winter, and the early spring flowers bloomed again in the shrubberies and on the lawn at Hazlewood. The primroses were pale upon the tender grass of the sloping banks in the broad lane near the gates, and still no event had happened to break the tranquil monotony of that secluded household. Eleanor had grown familiar with every nook in the rambling old cottage; even with Launcelot Darrell's apartments, a suite of rooms on the bed-room floor, looking out into the grove at the back of the house. These rooms had been shut up for years, ever since Launcelot had sailed for India, and they had a desolate look, though fires were lighted in them periodically, and every scrap of furniture was kept carefully dusted.

"The rooms must always be ready," Mrs. Darrell said. "Mr. de Crespigny may die and my son may be called home suddenly."

So the three rooms, a bed-room, dressing-room,

and sitting-room, were kept in perfect order, and Laura and Eleanor wandered into them sometimes, in the idleness of a wet afternoon, and looked at the pictures upon the walls, the unfinished sketches piled one upon the top of another on the easel, or tried the little cottage piano, upon which Mr. Darrell had been wont to accompany himself when he sang. His mother always insisted upon this piano being tuned when the tuner come from Windsor to attend to Laura Mason's modern grand. The two girls used to talk a good deal of the widow's handsome son. They had heard him spoken of by his mother, by the servants, and by the few humble neighbours in scattered cottages near Hazlewood. They talked of his uncertain fortunes, his accomplishments, his handsome, haughty face, which Laura declared was faultless.

Miss Vane had by this time been a twelvemonth at Hazlewood. Her eighteenth birthday was past, and the girlishness of her appearance had matured into the serene beauty of early womanhood. The golden tints of her hair had deepened into rich auburn, her grey eyes looked darker under the shadow of her dark brows. When she went to spend a brief Christmas holiday with her

old friends, the Signora and Richard Thornton declared that she had altered very much since she had left them, and were surprised at her matured beauty. She bought the silk gown for Eliza Picirillo, and the meerschaum pipe for poor Dick, who needed no memorial of his adopted sister; for her image haunted him only too perpetually, to the destruction of all other images which might else have found a place in the scene-painter's heart.

Eleanor Vane felt a pang of remorse as she remembered how very easily she had borne her separation from these faithful friends. It was not that she loved them less, or forgot their goodness to her. She had no such ingratitude as that wherewith to reproach herself; but she felt as if she had committed a sin against them in being happy in the calm serenity of Hazlewood.

She said this to Richard Thornton during the brief Christmas visit. They had walked out once more in the quiet streets and squares in the early winter twilight.

"I feel as if I had grown selfish and indifferent," she said. "The months pass one after another. It is two years and a-half since my father died, and I am not one step nearer to the discovery of

the man who caused his death. Not one step. I am buried alive at Hazlewood. I am bound hand and foot. What can I do, Richard; what can I do? I could go mad, almost, when I remember that I am a poor helpless girl, and that I may never be able to keep the oath I swore when I first read my dead father's letter. And you, Richard, in all this time you have done nothing to help me."

The scene-painter shook his head sadly enough.

"What can I do, my dear Eleanor? What I told you nearly a year ago, I tell you again now. This man will never be found. What hope have we? what chance of finding him? We might hear his name to-morrow, and we should not know it. If either of us met him in the street, we should pass him by. We might live in the same house with him, and be ignorant of his presence."

"No, Richard," cried Eleanor Vane. "I think if I met that man some instinct of hate and horror would reveal his identity to me."

"My poor romantic Nelly, you talk as if life was a melodrama. No, my dear, I say again, this man will never be found; the story of your father's death is unhappily a common one. Let that sad story rest, Nell, with all the other

mournful records of the past. 'Believe me that you cannot do better than be happy at Hazlewood; happy in your innocent life, and utterly forgetful of the foolish vow you made when you were little better than a child. If all the improbabilities that you have ever dreamt of were to come to pass, and vengeance were in your grasp, I hope and believe, Nell, that a better spirit would arise within you, and prompt you to let it go."

Richard Thornton spoke very seriously. He had never been able to speak of Eleanor's scheme of retribution without grief and regret. He recognised the taint of her father's influence in this vision of vengeance and destruction. All George Vane's notions of justice and honour had been rather the meretricious and flimsy ideas of a stage play, than the common-sense views of real life. He had talked incessantly to his daughter about days of retribution; gigantic vengeances which were looming somewhere in the far-away distance, for the ultimate annihilation of the old man's enemies. This foolish, ruined spendthrift, who cried out against the world because his money was spent, and his place in that world usurped by wiser men, had

been Eleanor's teacher during her most impressionable years. It was scarcely to be wondered at, then, that there were some flaws in the character of this motherless girl, and that she was ready to mistake a pagan scheme of retribution for the Christian duty of filial love.

Midsummer had come and gone, when an event occurred to break the tranquillity of that simple household.

The two girls had lingered late in the garden one evening early in July. Mrs. Darrell sat writing in the breakfast-parlour. The lamplight glimmered under the shadow of the verandah, and the widow's tall figure seated at her desk was visible through the open bay-window.

Laura and her companion had been talking for a long time, but Eleanor had lapsed into silence at last, and stood against the low white gate with her elbow resting upon the upper bar, looking thoughtfully out into the lane. Miss Mason was never the first to be tired of talking. A silvery torrent of innocent babble was for ever gushing from her red, babyish lips; so, when at last Eleanor grew silent and absent-minded, the heiress was fain to talk to her dogs; her darling silky Skye, whose great brown eyes looked out

from a ball of floss silk that represented the animal's head; and her Italian greyhound, a slim shivering brute, who wore a coloured flannel paletot, and exhibited a fretful and whimpering disposition, far from agreeable to any one but his mistress.

There was no moon upon this balmy July night, and the hulking hobadahoy of all work came out to light the lamp while the two girls were standing at the gate. This lamp gave a pleasant aspect to the cottage upon dark nights, and threw a bright line of light into the obscurity of the lane.

The boy had scarcely retired with his short ladder and flaming lantern, when the two pet dogs began to bark violently, and a man came out of the darkness into the line of lamplight.

Laura Mason gave a startled scream; but Eleanor caught her by the arm, to check her foolish outcry.

There was nothing very alarming in the aspect of the man. He was only a tramp: not a common beggar, but a shabby-genteel-looking tramp, whose threadbare coat was of a fashionable make, and who, in spite of his ragged slovenliness, had something the look of a gentleman.

"Mrs. Darrell still lives here, does she not?" he asked rather eagerly.

"Yes."

It was Eleanor who answered. The dogs were still barking, and Laura was still looking very suspiciously at the stranger.

"Will you tell her, please, that she is wanted out here by some one who has something important to communicate to her," the man said.

Eleanor was going towards the house to deliver this message, when she saw Mrs. Darrell coming across the lawn. She had been disturbed at her writing by the barking of the dogs.

"What is the matter, Miss Vincent," she asked, sharply. "Who are you and Laura talking to, out here?"

She walked from the two girls to the man, who stook back a little way outside the gate, with the lamplight shining full upon his face.

The widow looked sternly at this man who had dared to come to the gate at nightfall and to address the two girls under her charge.

But her face changed as she looked at him, and a wild cry broke from her lips.

"Launcelot, Launcelot, my son!"

CHAPTER XV.

LAUNCELOT.

MRS. DARRELL stood for some time clasped in her son's embrace, and sobbing violently. The two girls withdrew a few paces, too bewildered to know what to do, in the first shock of the surprise that had come so suddenly upon them.

This was Launcelot Darrell, then, the long absent son, whose portrait hung above the mantelpiece in the dining-room, whose memory was so tenderly cherished, every token of whose former presence was so carefully preserved.

"My boy, my boy," murmured the widow, in a voice which seemed strange to the two girls, from its new accent of tenderness; "my own and only son, how is it that you come back to me thus? I thought you were in India. I thought—"

"I was in India, mother, when my last letter to you was written," the young man answered; "but you know how sick and tired I was of the

odious climate, and the odious life I was compelled to lead. It grew unbearable at last, and I determined to throw everything up, and come home; so I sailed in the first vessel that left Calcutta after I had formed this determination. You're not sorry to see me back, are you, mother?"

"Sorry to see you, Launcelot!"

Mrs. Darrell led her son across the lawn and into the house, through an open window. She seemed utterly unconscious of the presence of her two charges. She seemed to have forgotten their very existence in the wonderful surprise of her son's return. So Laura and Eleanor went up to Miss Mason's room and shut themselves in to talk over the strange adventures of the evening, while the mother and son were closeted together in the breakfast-room below.

"Isn't it all romantic, Nelly, dear?" Miss Mason said, with enthusiasm. "I wonder whether he came all the way from India in that dreadful coat and that horrid shabby hat? He looks just like the hero of a novel, doesn't he, Nell? dark and pale, and tall and slender. Has he come back for good, do you think? I'm sure he ought to have Mr. de Crespigny's fortune."

Miss Vane shrugged her shoulders. She was not particularly interested in the handsome prodigal son who had made his appearance so unexpectedly; and she had enough to do to listen to all Laura's exclamations, and sympathise with her curiosity.

"I shan't sleep a bit to-night, Nelly," Miss Mason said, as she parted from her friend. "I shall be dreaming of Launcelot Darrell, with his dark eyes and pale face. What a fierce, half-angry look he has, Nell, as if he were savage with the world for having treated him badly. For he must have been badly treated, you know. We know how clever he is. He ought to have been made a governor-general, or an ambassador, or something of that kind, in India. He has no right to be shabby."

"I should think his shabbiness was his own fault, Laura," Miss Vane answered, quietly. "If he is clever, you know, he ought to be able to earn money."

She thought of Richard Thornton, as she spoke, working at the Phœnix Theatre for the poor salary that helped to support the Bohemian comforts of that primitive shelter in the Pilasters; and Dick's paint and whitewash bespattered coat

seemed glorified by contrast with that of the young prodigal in the room below.

The two girls went down to the breakfast-room early the next morning, Laura Mason arrayed in her prettiest and brightest muslin morning dress, which was scarcely so bright as her beaming face. The young lady's gossamer white robes fluttered with the floating ribbons and delicate laces that adorned them. She was a coquette by nature, and was eager to take her revenge for all the monotonous days of enforced seclusion which she had endured.

Mrs. Darrell was sitting at the breakfast table when the two girls entered the room. Her Bible lay open amongst the cups and saucers near her. Her face was pale. She looked even more careworn than usual; and her eyes were dimmed by the tears that she had shed. The heroism of the woman who had borne her son's absence silently and uncomplainingly, had given way under the unlooked-for joy of his return.

She gave her hand to each of the girls as they wished her good morning. Eleanor almost shuddered as she felt the deadly coldness of that wasted hand.

"We will begin breakfast at once, my dears,"

Mrs. Darrell said, quietly; "my son is fatigued by a long journey, and exhausted by the excitement of his return. He will not get up, therefore, until late in the day."

The widow poured out the tea, and for some little time there was silence at the breakfast table. Neither Eleanor nor Laura liked to speak. They both waited—one patiently, the other very impatiently—until Mrs. Darrell should please to tell them something about her son's extraordinary return.

It seemed as if the mistress of Hazlewood, usually so coldly dignified and self-possessed, felt some little embarrassment in speaking of the strange scene of the previous night.

"I need scarcely tell you, Laura," she said, rather abruptly, after a very long pause, "that if anything could lessen my happiness in my son's return, it would be the manner of his coming back to his old home. He comes back to me poorer than when he went away. He came on foot from Southampton here; he came looking like a tramp and a beggar to his mother's house. But it would be hard if I blamed my poor boy for this. The sin lies at his uncle's door. Maurice de Crespigny should have known that Colonel

Darrell's only son would never stoop to a life of commercial drudgery. Launcelot's letters might have prepared me for what has happened. Their brevity, their bitter, despondent tone, might have told the utter hopelessness of a commercial career for my son. He tells me that he left India because his position there—a position which held out no promise of improvement—had become unbearable. He comes back to me penniless, with the battle of life before him. You can scarcely wonder, then, that my happiness in his return is not unalloyed."

"No, indeed, dear Mrs. Darrell," Laura answered, eagerly; "but still you must be very glad to have him back: and if he didn't make a fortune in India, he can make one in England, I dare say. He is so handsome, and so clever, and—"

The young lady stopped suddenly, blushing under the cold scrutiny of Ellen Darrell's eyes. Perhaps in that moment a thought flashed across the mind of the widow; the thought of a wealthy marriage for her handsome son. She knew that Laura Mason was rich, for Mr. Monckton had told her that his ward would have all the advantages in after life which wealth can bestow; but

she had no idea of the amount of the girl's fortune.

Launcelot Darrell slept late after his pedestrian journey. Miss Mason's piano was kept shut, out of consideration for the traveller; and Laura and Eleanor found the bright summer's morning unusually long. They had so few pursuits, or amusements, that to be deprived of one seemed very cruel. They were sitting after their early dinner, in a shady nook in the shrubbery, Laura lying on the ground, reading a novel, and Eleanor engaged in some needle-work achievement which was by-and-by to be presented to the Signora; when the rustling leaves of the laurel screen that enclosed and sheltered their retreat, were parted, and the handsome face, the face which had looked worn and haggard last night, but which now had only an aristocratic air of languor, presented itself before them in a frame of dark foliage.

"Good morning, or good afternoon, young ladies," said Mr. Darrell, "for I hear that your habits at Hazlewood are very primitive, and that you dine at three o'clock. I have been looking for you during the last half-hour, in my anxiety to apologise for any alarm I may have given you

last night. When the landless heir returns to his home, he scarcely expects to find two angels waiting for him on the threshold. I might have been a little more careful of my toilet, had I been able to foresee my reception. What luggage I had I left at Southampton."

"Oh! never mind your dress, Mr. Darrell," Laura answered gaily, "we are both so glad you have come home. Ain't we, Eleanor? for our lives are so dreadfully dull here, though your mamma is very kind to us. But do tell us all about your voyage home, and your journey here on foot, and all the troubles you have gone through? Do tell us your adventures, Mr. Darrell?"

The young lady lifted her bright blue eyes with a languishing glance of pity; but suddenly dropped them under the young man's gaze. He looked from one to the other of the two girls, and then, strolling into the grassy little amphitheatre where they were sitting, flung himself into a rustic arm-chair, near the table at which Eleanor Vane sat at work.

Launcelot Darrell was a handsome likeness of his mother. The features which in her face were stern and hard, had in his an almost feminine softness. The dark eyes had a lazy light in them,

and were half-hidden by the listless droop of the black lashes that fringed their full white lids. The straight nose, low forehead, and delicately moulded mouth, were almost classical in their physical perfection; but there was a something wanting in the lower part of the face; the chin receded a little where it should have projected, the handsome mouth was weak and undecided in expression.

Mr. Darrell might have sat as a painter's model for all the lovers in prose or poetry; but he would never have been mistaken for a hero or a statesman. He had all the attributes of grace and beauty, but not one of the outward signs of greatness. Eleanor Vane felt this want of power in the young man as she looked at him. Her rapid perception seized upon the one defect which marred so much perfection.

"If I had need of help against the murderer of my father," the girl thought, "I would not ask this man to aid me."

"And now, Mr. Darrell," said Laura, throwing down her book, and settling herself for a flirtation with the prodigal son, "tell us all your adventures. We are dying to hear them."

Launcelot Darrell shrugged his shoulders.

"What adventures, my dear Miss Mason?"

"Why, your Indian experiences, of course, and your journey home. All your romantic escapes, and thrilling perils, tiger-hunting, pig-sticking—that doesn't sound romantic, but I suppose it is—lonely nights in which you lost yourself in the jungle, horrible encounters with rattlesnakes, brilliant balls at Government House—you see I know all about Indian life—rides on the race-course, flirtations with Calcutta belles."

The young man laughed at Miss Mason's enthusiasm.

"You know more about the delights of an Indian existence than I do," he said, rather bitterly; "a poor devil who goes out to Calcutta with only one letter of introduction, and an empty purse, and is sent up the country, within a few days of his arrival, to a lonely station, where his own face is about the only white one in the neighbourhood, hasn't very much chance of becoming familiar with Government House festivities, or Calcutta belles, who reserve their smiles for the favoured children of fortune, I can assure you. As to tiger-hunts and pig-sticking, my dear Miss Mason, I can give you very little information upon those points, for an indigo-planter's overseer,

whose nose is kept pretty close to the grindstone, has enough to do for his pitiful stipend, and very little chance of becoming a Gordon Cumming or a Jules Gerard."

Laura Mason looked very much disappointed.

"You didn't like India, then, Mr. Darrell?" she said.

"I hated it," the young man answered, between his set teeth.

There was so much suppressed force in Launcelot Darrell's utterance of these three words, that Eleanor looked up from her work, startled by the young man's sudden vehemence.

He was looking straight before him, his dark eyes fixed, his strongly marked eyebrows contracted, and a red spot burning in the centre of each pale and rather hollow cheek.

"But why did you hate India?" Laura asked, with unflinching pertinacity.

"Why does a man hate poverty and humiliation, Miss Mason? You might as well ask me that. Suppose we drop the subject. It isn't a very agreeable one to me, I assure you."

"But your voyage home," pursued Laura, quite unabashed by this rebuff; "you can tell us your adventures during the voyage home."

"I had no adventures. Men who travel by the overland route may have something to tell, perhaps: I came the cheapest and the slowest way."

"By a sailing vessel?"

"Yes."

"And what was the name of the vessel?"

"The Indus."

"The Indus, that's an easy name to remember. But of course you had all sorts of amusements on board; you played whist in the cuddy—what is the cuddy, by-the-bye?—and you got up private theatricals, and you started an amateur newspaper, or a magazine, and you crossed the line, and—"

"Oh, yes, we went through the usual routine. It was dreary enough. Pray tell me something about Hazlewood, Miss Mason; I am a great deal more interested in Berkshire than you can possibly be in my Indian experiences."

The young lady was fain to submit. She told Mr. Darrell such scraps and shreds of gossip as form the "news" in a place like Hazlewood. He listened very attentively to anything Miss Mason had to tell about his uncle, Maurice de Crespigny."

"So those tiger cats, my maiden aunts, are as watchful as ever," he said, when Laura had finished. "Heaven grant the harpies may be disappointed. Do any of the Vane family ever try to get at the old man?"

Eleanor looked up from her work, but very quietly; she had grown accustomed to hear her name spoken by those who had no suspicion of her identity.

"Oh, no, I believe not," Miss Mason answered; "old Mr. Vane died two or three years ago, you know."

"Yes, my mother wrote me word of his death."

"You were in India when it happened, then?"

"Yes."

Eleanor's face blanched, and her heart beat with a fierce heavy throbbing against her breast. How dared they talk of her dead father in that tone of almost insolent indifference. The one passion of her young life had as strong a power over her now as when she had knelt in the little chamber in the Rue de l'Archevêque, with her clasped hands uplifted to the low ceiling, and a terrible oath upon her girlish lips.

She dropped her work suddenly, and rising

from her rustic seat, walked away from the shade of the laurels.

"Eleanor," cried Laura Mason, "where are you going?"

Launcelot Darrell sat in a lounging attitude, trifling with the reels of silk, and balls of wool, and all the paraphernalia of fancy work scattered upon the table before him, but he lifted his head as Laura uttered her friend's name, and perhaps for the first time looked steadily at Miss Vane.

He sat looking at her for some minutes while she and Laura stood talking together a few paces from him. It was perhaps only a painter's habit of looking earnestly at a pretty face that gave intensity to his gaze. He dropped his eyelids presently, and drew a long breath, that sounded almost like a sigh of relief.

"An accidental likeness," he muttered; "there are a hundred such likenesses in the world."

He got up and walked back to the house, leaving the two girls together. Laura had a great deal to say about his handsome face, and the easy grace of his manner; but Eleanor Vane was absent and thoughtful. The mention of her father's name had brought back the past. Her peaceful life, and all its quiet contentment, melted

away like a curtain of morning mist that rises to disclose the ghastly horror of a battle-field; and the dreadful picture of the past arose before her; painfully vivid, horribly real. The parting on the boulevard; the long night of agony and suspense; the meeting with Richard on the bridge by the Morgue; her father's torn, disjointed letter; and her own vengeful wrath; all returned to her. Every voice of her heart seemed to call her away from the commonplace tranquillity of her life to some desperate act of justice and retribution.

"What have I to do with this frivolous girl?" she thought; "what is it to me whether Launcelot Darrell's nose is Grecian or aquiline, whether his eyes are black or brown? What a wretched, useless life I am leading in this place, when I should be hunting through the world for the murderer of my father."

She sighed wearily as she remembered how powerless she was. What could she do to get one step nearer to the accomplishment of that single purpose, which she called the purpose of her life? Nothing! She remembered with a chill feeling of despair that however, in her moments of exaltation, she might look forward to some shadowy day of triumph and revenge, her better sense

always told her that Richard Thornton had spoken the truth. The man whose treachery had destroyed George Vane had dropped into the chaos of an over-crowded universe, leaving no clue behind him by which he might be traced.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAWYER'S SUSPICION.

MR. MONCKTON came to Hazlewood upon the day after Launcelot Darrell's arrival. The grave solicitor had known the young man before his departure for India, but there seemed no very great intimacy between them, and Mr. Darrell appeared rather to avoid any familiarity with his mother's rich friend.

He answered Gilbert Monckton's questions about India and indigo-planting with an air of unwillingness that was almost insolent.

"The last few years of my life have not been so very pleasant as to make me care to look back at them," he said, bitterly. "Some men keep a diary of the experiences of each day—I found the experiences tiresome enough in themselves, and had no wish to incur the extra fatigue of writing about them. I told my uncle, when he forced a commercial career upon me, that he was making

a mistake; and the result has proved that I was right."

Mr. Darrell spoke with as much gentlemanly indifference as if he had been discussing the affairs of a stranger. He evidently thought that the mistakes of his life rested upon other people's shoulders; and that it was no shame to him, but rather to his credit as a fine gentleman, that he had come home penniless and shabby to sponge upon his mother's slender income.

"And now you have come back, what do you mean to do?" Mr. Monckton asked, rather abruptly.

"I shall go in for painting. I'll work hard, down in this quiet place, and get a picture ready for the Royal Academy next year. Will you sit for me, Miss Mason? and you, Miss Vincent? you would make a splendid Rosalind and Celia. Yes, Mr. Monckton, I shall try the sublime art whose professors have been the friends of princes."

"And if you fail—"

"If I fail, I'll change my name, and turn itinerant portrait-painter. But I don't suppose my uncle Maurice means to live for ever. He must leave his money to somebody. If Providence favours me my respected aunts may happen

to offend him a few hours before his death, and he may make a will in my favour, in order to revenge himself upon them. I think that's generally the way of it, eh, Mr. Monckton? The testator doesn't consider the delight of the person who *is* to get his money, but gloats over the aggravation of the poor wretch who *isn't*."

The young man spoke as carelessly as if the Woodlands fortune were scarcely worth a discussion. It was his habit to speak indifferently of all things, and it was rather difficult to penetrate his real sentiments, so skilfully were they hidden by this surface manner.

"You had a formidable rival once in your uncle's affections!" Mr. Monckton said presently.

"Which rival?"

"The Damon of Maurice de Crespigny's youth, George Vandeleur Vane."

Launcelot Darrell's face darkened at the mention of the dead man's name. It had always been the habit of the De Crespigny family to look upon Eleanor's father as a subtle and designing foe, against whom no warfare could be too desperate.

"My uncle could never have been such a fool as to leave his money to that spendthrift," Mr. Darrell said.

Eleanor had been sitting at an open window busy with her work during this conversation; but she rose hastily as Launcelot spoke of her father. She was ready to do battle for him then and there, if need were. She was ready to fling off the disguise of her false name, and to avow herself as George Vane's daughter, if they dared to slander him. Whatever shame or humiliation was cast upon him should be shared by her.

But before she could give way to this sudden impulse, Gilbert Monckton spoke, and the angry girl waited to hear what he might say.

"I have every reason to believe that Maurice de Crespigny would have left his money to his old friend had Mr. Vane lived," the lawyer said. "I never shall forget your uncle's grief when he read the account of the old man's death in a 'Galignani' which was put purposely in his way by one of your aunts."

"Ah," said Mr. Darrell, bitterly, "George Vane's death cleared the way for those harpies."

"Or for you, perhaps."

"Perhaps. I have not come home to wait for a dead man's shoes, Mr. Monckton."

Mrs. Darrell had been listening to this conversation, with her watchful eyes fixed upon Gilbert

Monckton's face. She spoke now for the first time.

"My son is the proper person to inherit my uncle's fortune," she said; "he is young, and has a bright future before him. Money would be of some use to *him;* but it would be almost useless to my sisters."

She glanced at the young man as she spoke; and in that one kindling glance of maternal pride the widow revealed how much she loved her son.

The young man was leaning in a lounging attitude over the piano, turning the leaves of Laura's open music-book, and now and then striking his fingers on the notes.

Mr. Monckton took up his hat, shook hands with his ward and with Mrs. Darrell, and then went over to the window at which Eleanor sat.

"How silent you have been this morning, Miss Vincent," he said.

The girl blushed as she looked up at the lawyer's grave face. She always felt ashamed of her false name when Mr. Monckton addressed her by it.

"When are you and Laura coming to see my new picture?" he asked.

"Whenever Mrs. Darrell likes to bring us," Eleanor answered, frankly.

"You hear, Mrs. Darrell?" said the lawyer; "these two young ladies are coming over to Tolldale to see a genuine Raphael that I bought at Christie's a month ago. You will be taking your son to see his uncle, I have no doubt—suppose you come and lunch at the Priory on the day you go to Woodlands."

"That will be to-morrow," answered Mrs. Darrell. "My uncle cannot deny himself to Launcelot after an absence of nearly five years, and even my sisters can scarcely have the impertinence to shut the door in my son's face."

"Very well; Woodlands and the Priory lie close together. You can cross the park and get into Mr. de Crespigny's grounds by the wicket-gate, and so surprise the enemy. That will be the best plan."

"If you please, my dear Mr. Monckton," said the widow.

She was gratified at the idea of stealing a march upon her maiden sisters, for she knew how difficult it was to effect an entrance to the citadel so jealously guarded by them.

"Come, young ladies," exclaimed Mr. Monck-

ton, as he crossed the threshold of the bay window, "will you honour me with your company to the gates."

The two girls rose and went out on to the lawn with the lawyer. Laura Mason was accustomed to obey her guardian, and Eleanor was very well pleased to pay all possible respect to Gilbert Monckton. She looked up to him as something removed from the commonplace sphere in which she felt so fettered and helpless. She fancied sometimes that if she could have told him the story of her father's death, he might have helped her to find the old man's destroyer. She had that implicit confidence in his power which a young and inexperienced woman almost always feels for a man of superior intellect who is twenty years her senior.

Mr. Monckton and the two girls walked slowly across the grass; but Laura Mason was distracted by her dogs before she reached the gate, and ran away into one of the shrubberied pathways after the refractory Italian greyhound.

The lawyer stopped at the gate. He was silent for some moments, looking thoughtfully at Eleanor, as if he had something particular to say to her.

"Well, Miss Vincent, how do you like Mr. Launcelot Darrell?" he asked at last.

The question seemed rather insignificant after the pause that had preceded it.

Eleanor hesitated.

"I scarcely know whether I like or dislike him," she said; "he only came the night before last, and—"

"And my question is what we call a leading one. Never mind, you shall tell me what you think by-and-by, when you have had more time to form an opinion. You think the young man handsome, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes! very handsome."

"But you are not the girl to be fascinated by a handsome face. I can see that you mean that by the contemptuous curl of your lip. Quite true, no doubt, Miss Vincent; but there are some young ladies less strong-minded than yourself, who may be easily bewitched by the outline of a classical profile, or the light of a pair of handsome dark eyes. Eleanor Vincent, do you remember what I said to you when I brought you down to Hazlewood?"

Mr. Monckton was in the habit of addressing both the girls by their Christian names when he spoke seriously.

"Yes, I remember perfectly."

"What I said to you then implied an amount of trust which I don't often put in an acquaintance of a couple of hours. That little girl yonder," added the lawyer, glancing towards the pathway in which Laura Mason flitted about, alternately coaxing and remonstrating with her dogs, "is tender-hearted and weak-headed. I think you would willingly do anything to serve her and me. You can do her no better service than by shielding her from the influence of Launcelot Darrell. Don't let my ward fall in love with the young man's handsome face, Miss Vincent!"

Eleanor was silent, scarcely knowing how to reply to this strange appeal.

"You think I am taking alarm too soon, I daresay," the lawyer said, "but in our profession we learn to look a long way ahead. I don't like the young man, Miss Vincent. He is selfish, and shallow, and frivolous,—false, I think, as well. And, more than this, there is a secret in his life."

"A secret?"

"Yes; and that secret is connected with his Indian experiences."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SHADOW ON GILBERT MONCKTON'S LIFE.

TOLLDALE PRIORY was a red brick mansion, lying deep in a valley, almost hidden amidst the thick woodland that surrounded it: a stately dwelling-place, shrouded and well-nigh entombed by the old trees that shut it in on every side, and made a screen through which only a glimpse of crimson brick could be seen from the bye-road or lane that approached the great iron gates.

From the hill-tops, high above that wooded valley, looking down into the sombre depths of verdure, one could see the gabled roof of the mansion, glimmering amid the woodland, like some rich jewel in its casket; and, at a little distance, the massive square tower of an ivy-grown old church, at which a few tenant-farmers about Tolldale, and the lords of the Priory and their retainers, were wont to worship.

The house was large and handsome; there was

a long banqueting hall with a roof of black oak, rich in quaint carvings, and a gloomy corridor, which were said to belong to the reign of Henry the Second; but the rest of the mansion had been built in the time of Queen Anne, and was of that prim and square order of architecture which Sir John Vanbrugh and his followers affected.

The garden was prim and square, like the house, and shut in from the road by high red brick walls, over some part of which the stone-moss had crept, and the ivy trailed for centuries; but the garden had grown out of the stiffness of Queen Anne's day, for every tree and shrub, every flower and weed, patch of grass, or cluster of ivy, grew so luxuriantly in this fertile valley, that it would have needed three times the number of gardeners that had been kept at Tolldale for the last twenty years, to preserve the neat order of the flower-beds and pathways, the holly hedges, the huge bushes of boxwood that had once been fashioned into the grim semblances of lions, swans, dragons, and elephants, and all the other stiff beauties of the pleasure-grounds.

Behind the house a couple of peacocks stalked

moodily about a stony courtyard, and a great watch-dog showed his sulky head at the mouth of his kennel, and barked incessantly at the advent of any visitor, as if the Priory had been some weird and enchanted dwelling to which no stranger had right of approach. The entrance to the house most commonly used, opened into this stony courtyard; and in the dusky, flagged hall, hung the ponderous and roomy riding-boots and the heavy saddle of some Tolldale who had distinguished himself in the civil wars.

The rainbow colours that glimmered on the stone pavement of this dusky entrance-hall were reflected from the crests and coats of arms, the interlaced ciphers, the coronets and bloody hands, emblazoned on the mullioned windows, whose splendour chastened and subdued the daylight; tempering the garish glory of heaven for the benefit of aristocratic eyes. But of all these crests and ciphers, of all these honourable insignia, not one belonged to the present owner of the house — Mr. Gilbert Monckton, the lawyer.

Tolldale Priory had changed hands several times since the monkish days in which the older part of the house had been built. Gilbert

Monckton had bought the estate twenty years before of a Mr. Ravenshaw, a reckless and extravagant gentleman, with an only daughter, whose beauty had been very much talked about in the neighbourhood. Indeed, report had gone so far as to declare that Gilbert Monckton had been desperately in love with this Margaret Ravenshaw, and that it was for her sake he had invested a great part of the splendid fortune left him by his father in the purchase of the Tolldale estate: thereby freeing the young lady's father from very terrible embarrassments, and enabling him to retire to the Continent with his only child.

There had been, certainly, considerable grounds for this report, as immediately after the transfer of the property, Gilbert Monckton quitted England, leaving his business in the hands of the two junior partners of the house—both much older men than himself, by-the-bye. He remained abroad for nearly two years; during which time everybody believed him to be travelling with Mr. Ravenshaw and his daughter, and at the end of that time returned; an altered man.

Yes; every one who had been intimate with Gilbert Monckton declared that a blight had fallen upon his life; and it was only natural

that they should go a little further than this, and conclude that this change had been brought about by an unhappy attachment; or in plainer words, that Margaret Ravenshaw had jilted him.

However this might be, the lawyer kept his secret. There was no unmanly sentimentalism in his nature. Whatever his sorrow was, he bore it very quietly, keeping it entirely to himself, and asking sympathy from no living creature. But from the hour of his return to England, he devoted himself to his profession with a determination and an assiduity that he had never before displayed.

This was the great change that his disappointment—whatever that disappointment may have been—had made in him. He did not become either a misanthrope or a bore. He became purely and simply a man of business. The frank, generous-hearted young squire, who had shunned his father's office as if every sheet of parchment or scrap of red tape had been infected by the pestilent vapours of a plague-stricken city, was transformed into a patient and plodding lawyer, whose gigantic grasp of thought and unfailing foresight were almost akin to genius.

For ten years Tolldale Priory was uninhabited by its new master, and left in the care of a snuff-taking old housekeeper, and a deaf gardener, who effectually kept all visitors at bay by a systematic habit of failing to hear the great bell at the iron gates; which might clang never so loudly under the shadow of its wooden pent-house without apparently producing the faintest impression upon the aural nerves of these two superannuated retainers. But at last the day came upon which Mr. Monckton grew tired of his London dwelling-place in a dingy square in Bloomsbury, and determined to take possession of his Berkshire estate. He sent a couple of upholsterers to Tolldale Priory, with strict injunctions to set the old furniture in order, but to do nothing more; not so much as to alter the adjustment of a curtain, or the accustomed position of a chair or table.

Perhaps he wished to see the familiar rooms looking exactly as they had looked when he had sat by Margaret Ravenshaw's side, a bright and hopeful lad of twenty. He kept the snuff-taking old housekeeper and the deaf gardener, and brought his own small staff of well-trained servants from London. The town-bred servants

would have willingly rebelled against their new dwelling-place, and the verdant shades that seemed to shut them in from the outer world; but their wages were too liberal to be resigned for any but a very powerful reason, and they submitted as best they could to the solitude of their new abode.

Mr. Monckton travelled backwards and forwards between Tolldale and London almost every day, driving to the station in his phaeton in the morning, and being met by his groom on his return in the evening. The lawyer's professional duties had taxed his strength to the utmost, and grave physicians had prescribed country air and occasional repose as absolutely necessary to him. For nearly ten years, therefore, he had lived at the Priory, forming few acquaintances, and positively no friends. His most intimate associates had been the De Crespignys. This had no doubt arisen from the circumstance of the Woodlands estate adjoining Tolldale. Mr. Monckton accepted the acquaintances whom accident forced upon him, but he sought none. Those who knew him best said that the shadow which had so early fallen upon his life had never passed away.

Of course Eleanor Vane had heard these things

during her residence at Hazlewood. The knowledge of them invested the grave lawyer with a halo of romance in her girlish eyes. He, like herself, had his secret, and kept it faithfully.

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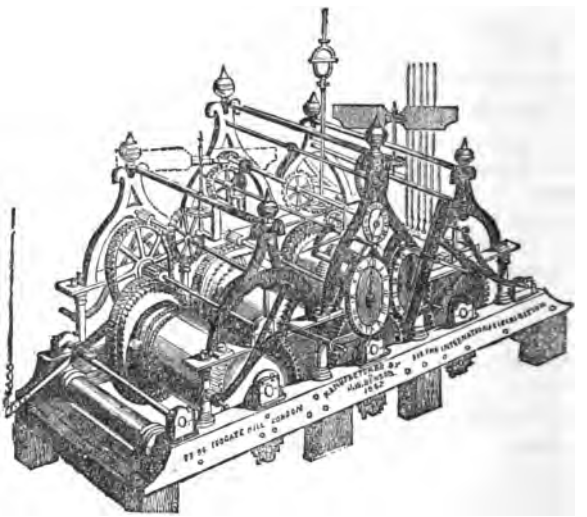

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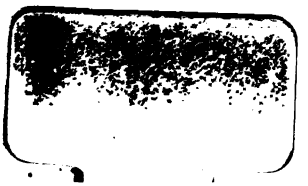
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